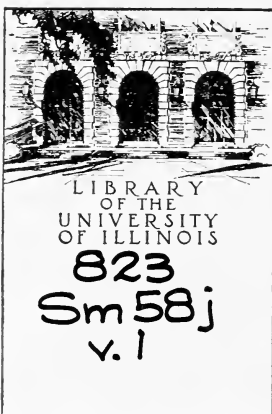
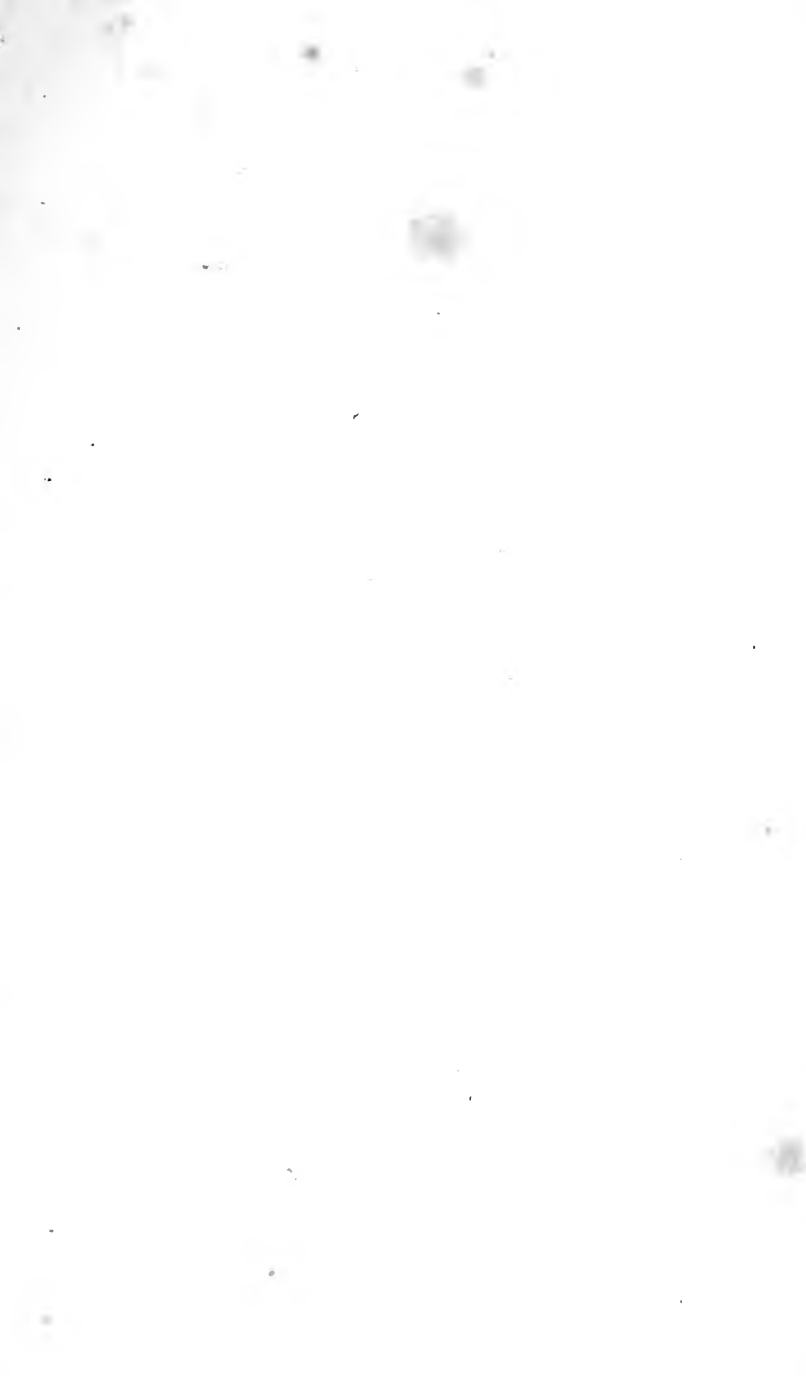


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JANE LOMAX;

OR

A MOTHER'S CRIME.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "BRAMBLETYE HOUSE,"

"REUBEN APSLEY," &c.

———" Was 't not to make thee great,
That I have run, and still pursue, these ways,
That hale down curses on me?"

MASSINGER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1838.

LONDON :
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P R E F A C E.

WHEN the reader learns that the following Tale was written three or four years ago, about which period the rage for what are termed Fashionable Novels had reached its culminating point, he may, perhaps, be surprised to find that its scenes are mostly laid in the unromantic purlieus of Bermondsey and Shad-Thames, and that its characters are entirely chosen from a class which has not been deemed either high enough or low enough to figure in our recent works of fiction. In the generality of these compositions, many of them evincing

11 Nov. 52 M. Laughton

Gen. M. R. Ray 23 Aug 51 Shad. = 30.

the highest order of talent, the prominent personages bear sounding titles, maintain large establishments, and move only in the quarters consecrated to our aristocracy; the other actors in the drama being taken from inferior, not to say low, life, and rendered as vulgar and ridiculous as possible, that they may act as foils to their superiors.

Writers of this school, forgetting that there is an innate vulgarity, quite independent of external observances and forms, and quite as likely, therefore, to be encountered among the peerage as the peasantry, have confined it to certain conventional phrases, personal peculiarities, and domestic usages. Even if this narrow view be not opposed to Nature and to truth, it can hardly be denied that it has a mischievous tendency to widen the breach, where too great a severance and alienation of classes already forms the besetting sin of our social system.

As the passions of our common nature are equally irrespective of birth and locality, the middling ranks and those immediately beneath them, however unclassical may be their avocations and abodes, surely present not less available materials to the Novelist, than the virtues and the vices of the higher orders. We have tragedies, such as the *Gamester*, *George Barnwell*, and others, where the pathos of the scene seems to be rendered more thrilling, and to come more immediately home to our business and bosoms, because the characters are taken from among the less elevated classes of society. The Germans and the French have novels exclusively illustrative of the manners of the people ; and they who have read the works of MICHAEL RAYMOND, or even the single most affecting tale of "*Le Maçon*," must admit that the adventures of artisans and shopkeepers are not less susceptible of deep interest than the woes of coronetted grandeur

With these examples and encouragements, the Author has attempted a Tale, of which the scene is principally laid in those plebeian purlicus to which he has already referred, the characters being chosen from that proscribed, or at least neglected sphere, the lower grades of middling life. He has not avoided the delineation of individual vulgarity, but he has not made it the characteristic of a class; while he has ventured to introduce instances of refinement and dignified feeling among his unfashionables, because he cannot find in real life any warrant for the doctrine that the less noble are, in the aggregate, more ignoble than others.

The writer is fully aware that he labours under the disadvantage of combating long-established associations, and he feels himself, therefore, justified in making an especial appeal to the indulgence of the reader. If he succeed in interesting and amusing, his experiment will

need no further apology, and indeed so humble a Tale scarcely demands so formal an introduction as that which he has already penned. If he fail, he will assign his want of success to his deficiency of talent, rather than to any error in his theory, for he feels assured that this department of novel-writing only requires more able hands to be prosecuted to a more fortunate result.

Brighton,
November, 1837.



JANE LOMAX.

CHAPTER I.

"I wish that it may not prove some ominous foretoken of misfortune to have met with such a miser."

SIDNEY.

IN one of the narrow back streets of Bristol, an expiring coke fire, winking and clicking in the old-fashioned grate of a shabby room, threw a dim gleam upon the surrounding Dutch tiles, stamped with rude figures of saints and martyrs ; while the faint light emitted from a single unsnuffed candle, placed on a circular oaken table, gave an additional air of penury and

gloom to those portions of the apartment which its feeble ray was enabled to penetrate.

The mantel-shelf, lumbered with a confused assemblage of phials, pill-boxes, and gallipots, would have sufficiently revealed to any casual observer that he was in a sick chamber, which, however, exhibited none of the luxuries, or even comforts, usually provided for the accommodation of an invalid. Instead of a warm carpet, patches of cold well-worn oilcloth were nailed to the floor ; neither sofa nor easy chair was to be seen ; the scanty furniture was of the meanest description ; and, although the tall dusky bed seemed by its wrought canopy, which touched the ceiling, to have once known better days, its tattered fringe and faded hangings betrayed that many a long year had elapsed since it had received any renovating touches from the upholsterer : while its disproportionate height and sombre hue, together with the blended ghastliness of the dim candle and

half-extinguished fire, which left a part of its outline in deep shade, imparted to it an almost spectral character, if we can imagine a piece of furniture to be susceptible of any such effect.

It looked like a death-bed, and such, indeed, it might be termed; for its knotted mattress was pressed at this moment by Diedrich Hoffman, an old German, labouring under a fatal malady, who for upwards of forty years had carried on the business of a sugar-baker in Bristol, where he had amassed a handsome fortune by the profits of his trade, and by penurious habits, of which the rigour might be inferred from the slight description we have given of his abode. Naturally averse to all change, and well knowing that no removal can be effected without expence, he had continued to occupy his present residence from his first arrival in the city, grudging even the trifling expenditure necessary to renew its furniture,

or repair its dilapidations, so that it had gradually fallen into a very forlorn state.

And yet, notwithstanding these flagrant manifestations of a sordid spirit, Diedrich Hoffman could hardly be termed a miser. True, he denied himself almost every gratification that other men covet, but it was because he differed from their tastes, and found more pleasure in foregoing than in enjoying the ordinary delights of the world. An habitual economist, a confirmed old bachelor, and something of a humourist, he would, nevertheless, occasionally perform a liberal or even a munificent action, without deviating in other respects from his customary parsimony. When subscriptions had been set on foot for public objects, his name had stood upon more than one occasion at the head of the list.

That he had not been impelled to these rare conquests over his niggardly disposition by the vanity of being reputed a rich man, we will

not affirm ; but they proved, at all events, that he was not an inveterate or invariable miser, a fact of which he had offered more direct evidence by a recent alteration in his domestic establishment. When his health, which up to a late period had scarcely ever failed, began to give way, and he found himself sinking under the united attacks of age and illness, he began to feel, for the first time, the want of some companion in the house, who might relieve the tedium of confinement, minister to his amusement, and soothe the bed of sickness.

In one of those capricious freaks of charity, which sometimes in their spirit of opposition prompted him to assist and patronize any object whom all the rest of the world seemed determined to neglect, he had received into his counting-house an unhappy friendless being, who, after having struggled during the latter part of his life with poverty and misfortune, had supported his family, consisting of a wife

and two children, on the sorry pittance which he earned as clerk to a law-stationer. This man, by name Joel Lomax, had in the course of a few months so far recommended himself by his assiduity and integrity, that Hoffman not only made a considerable addition to the salary he had agreed to give him, but proposed that his wife and children, whose manners and appearance he had found singularly prepossessing, should take up their abode in his house. To this offer he was probably incited by the irksomeness of solitude, and that sense of his growing infirmities to which we have already alluded : but, whatever might have been his motives, the proposition was too beneficial to its object not to be eagerly and gratefully accepted.

Incessant were the whisperings and tattlings, and manifold the surmises, to which this unprecedented act of kindness gave rise ; but, when Hoffman ordered additional furniture for

the accommodation of his new inmates, directed the rooms set apart for their reception to be painted and repaired, although he left his own in their previous state of discomfort, and finally paid the bills thus incurred without one word of grumbling, the gossips of the neighbourhood were almost struck dumb by amazement. 'They who had previously condemned him for his churlish, penurious, and unsocial habits, now accused him of a wayward caprice, almost amounting to dotage and imbecility, in adopting an obscure stranger, and establishing that stranger's family in his house. Some predicted that the new companion, whose qualities, apart from his admitted diligence as a clerk, seemed to be little adapted to conciliate permanent regard, would soon forfeit the favour he had so abruptly and unexpectedly won; but others, who knew the old German to be obstinate both in his predilections and prejudices, were induced to form a very different conclusion, especially

when they adverted to his advanced age and waning health, which intimated no very remote termination to his life. They thought it not impossible that so singular and self-willed a character might even make his new inmate his heir, under which impression several, who had previously refused to notice the poverty-stricken clerk, now courted his society, reminding him that his benefactor had only one known relation in the world, a nephew, whom he had disinherited for having made an imprudent marriage with a strolling actress.

They urged Lomax, therefore, to ingratiate himself by every possible means with the old man, in the hope of succeeding to his property, or, at all events, of obtaining a handsome legacy, should he have left the bulk of his fortune, as was generally anticipated, to his partner and fellow-countryman, Mr. Vandermeulen. Instead of lending himself to the golden and aspiring thoughts which such sug-

gestions were calculated to awaken, the humble clerk, whose every hope seemed to have been crushed by long suffering and disappointment, repressed them as foolish and presumptuous dreams, to which it did not become him to listen, protesting that he had already received more favours from his benefactor than he should ever be enabled to requite. Cautious professions of this nature had been counselled by his wife, a woman whose shrewd, subtle, and powerful mind had obtained a complete ascendancy over the faculties of her weak and spirit-broken husband. With this brief prelude of explanation we return to the sick chamber.

Silence had reigned in it for some time, only interrupted by the occasional breathings of the slumbering invalid, and the regular ticking of a ponderous German watch suspended over the wooden mantel-shelf; when, from that side of the bed which was veiled in deep shade, Joel Lomax, the sick man's clerk, advanced

noiselessly towards the table in the centre of the room.

He was a tall, gaunt, stooping figure, apparently about sixty years of age, attired in a shabby suit of black, his deeply-furrowed cheeks and haggard countenance betraying long-endured cares and sorrows, with which, to judge by the cowed look of his eye, and the peculiar expression of imbecility about his mouth, he was but little qualified to struggle. After having snuffed the candle, he looked at the watch, and, taking two or three lumps of coke from a wooden box, dropped them softly on the fire, an operation, however, which he could not accomplish without making a noise that awoke the dozing patient.

“Fot is de madder?” asked Hoffman, who, from his having associated almost exclusively with his own countrymen in England, had never been able to shake off his German accent. “Is dat you, Lomax? Why don’t you come

when I gall? Sit by mine side. I must nod be left one minute to mineself."

"I did not dream, sir, of quitting you," said the clerk, resuming his station. "I merely rose to make up the fire."

"Bah! you are always butting goles ubon de fire. I shall be ruined wid all dese ex-benches; bote if you are tired of sidding in your chair, send dat goot woman your wife. She is an egcellent gind creature, and always dells me fain I should dake my draughts, and looks after de wasteful gook, dat I am nod robed and bilfered, now dat I mineself am died by de leg."

"She is anxious, sir, as in duty bound, to show her gratitude towards her benefactor, and so am I, and so, I trust, are we all."

"Drue! drue! you are all very goot do me, and very addendive. Your daughter Mary is a sharming girl, and so quiet, so gendle, so thoughtful, so soft spoken fain she read do me

de Brice Gurrent, de sales by auction, or de Gustom House entries and exborts, fot I dake a delight to hear ! Bote your boor boy Benjamin is doo delicate vor a sick room. He vainted away fain I was blooded. Don't let him gome do me no more—I don't like do see people vaint away : it botes me in mind of death."

"That dear boy has always been a delicate plant, and, even now, I sometimes doubt whether we shall rear him, a fear that makes me very unhappy."

"Bah ! Dat is only begause you are afraid to lose your happiness fot he gibbs you now. Ah ! mine goot vriend ! you have, besides, got a wife and a daughter vhat loafes you, and vhat can sid by your side and nurse you fain you get old and lose your brecious helt ; and I am aged and sick, and have got nobody fot loafes me. I begin do dink dat an old paitchelor is a melancholy ding to live, and a still more

bainful ding to die; and fain I ged aboud again—
vhich I drust will be soon, for I veel bedder,
moch bedder do-night — I shall lose no time,
bote look about me vor a zootable wife.”

Grave as was the temperament of Lomax,
he could hardly refrain from smiling, when he
coupled this strange declaration with the ad-
vanced years, as well as the doubtful state,
of the speaker, whose malady was of a much
more perilous nature than he himself seemed
to apprehend. His countenance, however,
preserved its usual submissive dejected expres-
sion; he said nothing, and the sick man con-
tinued.

“I should like, mine goot Lomax, do ged
oop do-morrow, and drive out a liddle way in
a hackney goach, vor I dink de air would do
me more goot dan all de dogtors stuff, and
wouldn't cost so moch. You and your wife
and taughter shall go wid me, and we will drive
upon de Clifton road; bote, fain we gome to

de dumbpike, we will durn about, for I am ruined enough already wid de dogtor's fees. Have you pote down in de betty gash boke how much you pay vor all dis robbery of mine burse?"

"I believe, sir, that Mrs. Lomax has entered every thing."

"Ah! she is a goot woman of business, and would have made a gabital boke-keeper. It is a gomfort when a man knows he will nod be blundered and robed by de beople aboud him."

Their colloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Vandermeulen, the patient's partner, a calculating, long-sighted, money-grasping man, who took no small interest in the health of his friend, since he verily believed himself to have been named his sole heir, an object which for many years past, and by a great variety of manœuvres, he had been seeking to accomplish.

Insiduously encouraging Hoffman's nephew to make an imprudent marriage, by assurances that his uncle's anger would be transient, and that a reconciliation would speedily be effected, although he knew the old man to be stubborn and almost inexorable, when once offended, he subsequently sought every opportunity to widen the breach between them, and his machinations finally succeeded.

With true German phlegm, Hoffman burnt, on the morning of his nephew's marriage, a will which he had made in his favour, merely exclaiming, as he tossed it into the fire, "Fain I leave mine broberty, it shall be to a man of goot jodgement, and nod to a jagass."

A few months afterwards, as he was on the point of visiting Cheltenham in the hope of re-establishing his health, he took his partner aside, and putting the draught of a fresh will into his hands, desired him to look it over, and let him know what he thought of it. By this

instrument he proposed leaving his whole fortune to his godson, Diedrich, Vandermeulen's eldest boy. Blinded by cupidity, the father, instead of expressing a becoming gratitude for this intended act of munificence, was indiscreet enough to betray a feeling of disappointment, suggesting that to make young men independent of their parents was a proceeding fraught with danger, and insinuating that it would be a much better arrangement were the money left to himself in the first instance. "I dought I should have bleased you," muttered the old man, "bote berhaps you are right, berhaps you are right." With these words he took back the paper, hobbled to his own room, and immediately committed it to the flames, repeatedly exclaiming, "Fain I leave mine broberty, it shall nod be to de son of a jagass, and still less to de old jagass himself."

On the following morning he proceeded to Cheltenham, during his visit to which place,

either mollified by the sense of his waning health, or touched by some other compunctious visiting of nature, he caused a new will to be prepared, in which he once more bequeathed his entire fortune to his nephew, Edward Rud-dock. This instrument, however, he did not execute, but brought it back with him to Bristol, sharing the common superstitious notion that to sign a last will and testament is like despatching a card of invitation to Death.

Although Mr. Vandermeulen, firmly believing his suggestion to have been adopted, was prepared to meet the demise of his partner, and to succeed to his property with a truly christian resignation ; he was anxious, for the sake of appearances, that nothing should be omitted which might seem calculated to prolong his life. During his illness he had been indefatigable in his attentions ; and the object of his present visit was to apprise the patient that, having felt it his duty to call in additional ad-

vice, a consultation of physicians would be held in the course of the next half hour. Feeble as he was, the choleric old German started up in his bed at this announcement, eructating oaths in his native tongue, and bestowing no very measured abuse upon his partner for subjecting him to such an additional expence, until he happened to recollect how completely the offender had outwitted himself in the affair of the will, when he became suddenly pacified, muttering with an inward chuckle and a ghastly grin : — “ Goot ! goot ! I have gaught him in his own trap. Diedrich Hoffman is not to be gajoled nor bambooshled. Well, well, led ’em gome, led ’em gome. I shall ged well in spite of all de dogtors and aboaticaries. I am bedder, moch bedder.”

An apothecary and physician had already been in attendance : one of the most eminent of the faculty then practising in Bristol, (we are speaking of the close of the last century)

was now added to their number, and the three shortly presented themselves at the patient's bed-side, putting the usual interrogatories, which he answered with a churlish impatience, and repeated declarations that he was "gedding bedder, and would nod drouble dem to gome to him no more." They then retired to the parlour below, where, being provided with pens, ink, and paper, they intimated to Vandermeulen and Lomax that they must withdraw, as witnesses were never allowed to be present at their consultations, especially in a case of so urgent and perilous a nature as the present, which might require long and deep deliberation.

The door being closed, and chairs drawn close to the fire, Dr. H—— exclaimed, as he inserted the poker between the bars, "I heard them blowing the horns as I drove hither. Is there any thing new?"

"A second edition of a London paper," said

his brother practitioner, "with an account of some despatches from the Mediterranean. It is reported that Nelson, having obtained a certain clue to the French fleet, has returned to the coast of Egypt."

"Ay, but it may be too late, now. I always said that he should never have left it," observed the first speaker, who was a keen politician.

"May I presume, Dr. H——, that you approve of what has been done?" inquired the apothecary, anxious that the leading practitioner should sanction his treatment of the sick man.

"Not at all, sir, not at all; quite the reverse. He should not have quitted Alexandria; for the French fleet, he might be well assured, could never remain long separated from the army."

"You mistake me, Doctor; I was speaking of our patient."

"How could I dream of that, sir? I pre-

sumed, of course, that you were alluding to Nelson. Any other news stirring?"

"None but what I presume you must have heard, the failure this morning of the house of Phillpotts and Patterson, an unlucky affair for me, for I lately attended Mr. Patterson's family of seven children, in measles and scarlatina, and I apprehend, from what I hear, that I must now be contented with a small dividend on my bill."

"You will be nothing out of pocket," said the physician, with a quiet smile.

"Nay, Doctor, you are not to suppose that our business, like your's, is all profit."

"True, true : I had forgotten the phials and pill-boxes. Sailed back again for the coast of Egypt, has he? He will miss them, mark my words. I am seldom wrong; he will miss them a second time."

"With regard to our patient," resumed the apothecary.

"I cannot quite agree with you," said the second practitioner, addressing himself to the first. "Nelson is a lucky man, or, in other words, a skilful and persevering commander. Depend upon it he will yet give a good account of the enemy."

Snuff-boxes were now produced, the fire was again stirred, and the medical politicians, who had totally forgotten the ostensible object of their meeting, entered into an animated discussion, which lasted several minutes, as to the probabilities of an engagement between the hostile fleets.

Availing himself of a momentary pause, the apothecary ventured to repeat:—"I hope, Dr. H——, that you approve of what I have done. May I ask what you consider to be our patient's particular and immediate complaint?"

"Old age; a disease that we have little chance of palliating, since one day adds more to it than twenty physicians can take from it."

"I am proud to find, Doctor, that your opinion coincides with mine. I saw from the first that it was an utterly hopeless case."

"If you were aware that professional advice was of no earthly use, I wonder you did not call me in sooner," said the second Esculapean, in a tone of reproach.

"I should have done so, Doctor, as usual in all such cases, but that my patient, who is as obstinate as a mule, would not consent to it."

"Upon such emergencies you should be imperative. We must not let a rich man slip out of the world without paying the customary tolls. In two or three days, although nature has rallied for the moment, he will no longer be a subject for any fees but those of the clergyman and undertaker."

"As all further consultations, then, are manifestly useless," resumed the apothecary, "we had better make up for lost time, and arrange

to meet twice a day, until we receive a mortuary dismissal."

"You are a man of business," said Dr. H——, with his accustomed tranquil smile. "From a rich, childless, penurious patient, like Diedrich Hoffman, I never decline a fee, in order that I may be enabled to refuse it when tendered by those who can less afford its disbursement."

"The first half of your example," said the second doctor, "is worthy of all imitation; but the latter clause must be executed with great discretion."

"I presume you will think it necessary to prescribe," hesitated the apothecary, pushing forward the pens and paper. "It is of little use, however, for my wrong-headed patient will no longer take any of my medicines."

"In that case," smiled Dr. H——, "he cannot possibly object if we order all the doses to be doubled. What say you, brother?"

“Nothing can be more reasonable; and I will write accordingly.”

A couple of illegible lines having been scribbled in Latin and duly signed, the sons of Galen, apparently not much exhausted by their deep and anxious deliberation, were about to quit the apartment, when the apothecary observed that the patient, so far from being aware of his rapidly-approaching dissolution, flattered himself with the hope that he was recovering, and would shortly be enabled to return to business. “How would you have me act,” he continued, addressing himself to Dr. H——, “as to communicating to him his real situation? What is your own rule upon such occasions?”

“That depends upon circumstances. Where I have reason to believe that the patient has settled all his worldly affairs, a fact which it is generally easy to ascertain from some of the family, I am anxious to leave him all the con-

solutions of hope, not only as it may smooth the path of death, if his complaint be incurable, but because I believe it possible that he may invigorate the vital principle by clinging with a confident tenacity to life. No one who knows what a mysterious, I had almost said a miraculous influence the mind sometimes exercises upon the body, will be surprised at this assertion. For the same reason, and especially in nervous cases, the very fear of death will often accelerate the death we fear; so that I hold it safer, as well as more humane, to soothe the bed of sickness by a delusion, which is certainly gratifying and may be salutary, than to agitate it by a truth which is sure to be painful and may be mischievous."

"I differ from you," said the second practitioner. "Your premises may be good, as far as they go, but you have omitted to advert to higher and more imperative considerations. The claims of religion supersede all others, and

I cannot suffer a fellow-creature to go out of the world without giving him an opportunity of making his peace with Heaven. My conscience will not suffer it."

"It is the same conscience, nevertheless," said Dr. H——, with a touch of irony in his smile, "which allows you to take fees from him twice a day, after you know his case to be hopeless. For my own part, I freely confess that I place no great faith in the efficacy of death-bed repentances. I doubt whether the eye of Omniscience can be so easily hoodwinked; whether the Deity can be propitiated by our offering him the devil's leavings; by our professing virtue when we can no longer practise sin; by our disowning his authority so long as disobedience flattered our evil passions and tardily and meanly crying out for quarter, not so much from a change of principle as of circumstances not from the love of religion or of heaven, so much as from the sel-

fish fear of a punishment which we braved until it became imminent. A living penitence, depend upon it, is ten thousand times better than a dying one."

"But, I believe," said the apothecary, "that Mr. Hoffman has never executed his will, although I am pretty confident that he has prepared one."

"In that case, my objections vanish; and, for the sake of the living, he had better be immediately informed that he is dying. He cannot possibly hold out more than ——. Hah! I hear the horns again! I must positively have a peep at the paper. Nelson will miss the French fleet. I have said it, and I repeat it."

Vandermeulen and Lomax were now summoned into the chamber, to receive the report of this long and arduous deliberation, as well as to pay the fees; when the diploma'd Esculapians, after appointing to meet again on the

following morning, took their departure, and the apothecary, for Vandermeulen declined that perilous office, returned to the sick room, to communicate to the patient the probability of his dissolution in the course of a few days.

CHAPTER II.

“ Here I acknowledge thee
My hope—the only jewel of my life—
The best of children—dearer than my breath—
A happiness as high as I could think:
And when my actions call thee otherwise,
Perdition light upon me !”

A KING AND NO KING.

HAVING had several opportunities of witnessing the unmanageable disposition of his patient, the bearer of these alarming tidings was not without apprehensions as to the effect they might produce; but Hoffman received them with no other change of countenance than a grin of incredulous scorn, as he exclaimed, “My goblements to yourself and de dogtors, and you are all liars and jagasses ! Mine own jodgement is bedder dan your’s, and

I feel dat I shall not be bote under de grass dis time, unless dere is a gonspiracy to gill me. I tell you I am bedder, moch bedder, ever since I left off daking your nasty drogs and rubbish."

"I am merely," resumed the apothecary, "giving you our unanimous and conscientious opinion, and, such being our conviction, I feel it my duty to inquire whether you wish to have any spiritual advice."

"I wish for noding what is to gost money."

"We will find a clergyman who shall attend you gratuitously."

"Den I won't see him, for none bote a jagass would give me his advice for noding, dat is, if it were wort having."

"It is my further duty to remind you that you have no time to lose, if you have not yet prepared your will."

"It is brebared, bote nod egsecuted. Hah! dat is a goot thought! a goot thought! If

you gill me among you, I must dake gare dat you do not plunder me too. Where is Joel Lomax? ”

“ I am here, sir,” said the clerk, who had just entered the apartment.

“ Lomax, give me mine drowzers : hah ! dis is de key of de oken gabinet in your ped-room ; onlock it, and you shall find on de dop shelf, behind a bundle of rags, a baper wrapped oop in a biece of old black gloth ; bring it to me widout ondying it.”

His directions were obeyed ; when he unfolded the cloth, and, taking out a paper, said, “ Hah ! dis is de will ; I will read it over do-night, and it shall be egsecuted do-morrow, fain de physicians come to veel my pulse and bick mine pocket.” At the mention of the word will, his partner, who had been listening at the door, made his appearance, eagerly tendering his services in whatever way they could be rendered available. “ Dank you, dank you

gindly, Vandermeulen," said the patient with a sardonic grin, "you were goot enough to give me a hint about mine will some dime ago, and you will find I have not forgotten it. For de bresent I will not drouble you, nor any von else ; bote, if you will all leave mine room, I will dry and get some sleep." So saying, he thrust the will under his pillow and composed himself for slumber, when his visitants withdrew ; and Lomax, who had passed the previous night in the sick room, despatched his wife to occupy a chair by the bedside of the invalid.

Ungovernable passions, humble station, and a considerable share of personal beauty, all fearful temptations to an ill-educated female, had occasioned Mrs. Lomax, at a very early age, to plunge into evil courses, over which we shall charitably drop a veil. A vigorous, penetrative mind, and a suppressed, but not extinguished, sense of rectitude, quickly enabling her to discern the errors of the course she was

pursuing, of which her keen sensibility had already made her feel the misery and the degradation, she sought eagerly for some means of recovering the station she had forfeited, an object which could only be effected by a decent marriage.

Most females similarly circumstanced would have been deterred by the difficulties of such an undertaking ; but, to a mind like her's, impediments were incentives, while her sharp discrimination soon found a fitting object on whom she might exercise her wiles. Joel Lomax, then engaged in a thriving trade, was respectable, amorous, and weak. Her blandishments, her beauty, and that almost irresistible fascination which a strong decided mind can exercise over one that is feeble and irresolute, quickly accomplished all the rest. In three months they were married.

From that moment, Mrs. Lomax became a reformed and altered woman. Aware of the

inappreciable value of character from the deeply-felt humiliation of its loss, she conducted herself so irreproachably in her new neighbourhood, where her previous history was unknown, that she won universal respect. Too quick and apprehensive not to perceive the deficiencies in her education, she secretly and assiduously commenced a course of self-instruction, a task which soon enabled a vigorous intellect like her's to take its station rather above than below the level of the sphere in which she was now moving.

From this late, though diligent and successful, cultivation of her talents, she derived no small advantage in after-years, since it qualified her to assist in the education of her children, under a reverse of fortune, which all her exertions and abilities, for she was her husband's chief counsellor and director, even in the affairs of business, had been unable to ward off.

In the struggles that ensued, and during the

late years of penury, when Lomax had supported himself and family on the pitiful salary of a law-stationer's clerk, she had endured every thing without uttering a single complaint as to her own lot, although she would occasionally, and even sharply, reproach her husband for his prostration of spirits and total want of manly fortitude. Her own composure, however, did not proceed from resignation, so much as from that proud resistance to calamity which is ever offered by a high and intrepid spirit. Knowing the enmity of fortune to have been unprovoked by any extravagance or indiscretion, an indignant sense of its injustice enabled her to endure it, not only without repining, but with a feeling of defiance that was much more consonant to her courageous soul than a covering submission.

By that benevolent provision of nature which generally concentrates the parental, or at least the maternal, affections upon whichever object,

from its physical or mental imperfections, has the most need of incessant watchfulness and love, the strong passions of Mrs. Lomax, which for so many years had been kept in restraint, vented themselves in an unmeasured and ungovernable fondness for her only son Benjamin, an amiable and beautiful, but sickly, youth, whom they had reared with the greatest difficulty, and upon whom the mother doated with a redoubled devotion every time that she snatched him, as it were, from the jaws of death. Upon each of these occasions, she felt as if he had been born again to her ; and thus the affection, which would have sufficed for several children, became concentrated upon one. A blind and excessive attachment of this nature not seldom punishes itself by spoiling its object ; but her son was of so happy a nature, so affectionate, so right-principled, so amiable, that he remained unperturbed, even by over-indulgence, and in some degree justified the

perilous tenderness which loved him “not wisely, but too well.” It was only when she adverted to the precarious state of this cherished boy that her resolute heart ever sank within her.

Had a stranger casually fixed his eyes upon Mrs. Lomax, as she entered the sick room, he would hardly have imagined her to correspond to the character we have been describing. Fifteen years younger than her husband, and still exhibiting considerable remains of personal beauty, her countenance was much more indicative of calmness than of those turbulent passions to which she had occasionally given way. Consciousness of superior mental power, even when combined with susceptibility to violent impulse, will often impart an air of composure to the features; and he who should have more closely scrutinized the lineaments of the party we are describing might have suspected, from her compressed mouth, well-opened, piercing

eye, and resolute brow, that she possessed a mind capable of almost any enterprise, when its latent energies should be called into action.

No sooner had she taken her station by the bed-side, than the sick man, rousing from his feigned slumber, said in a whisper, "Dat is you, mine goot Mrs. Lomax — I know your voodsteb ; is dere nobody else in de room?" An answer was given in the negative. "Den lock de door," he continued, "and bring me de gandle."

She did as she was directed, and Hoffman, fumbling under his pillow and drawing out the will, attempted to read it, but his eye-sight, which had been latterly failing him, was now so defective that he could not succeed, and he handed it over to Mrs. Lomax, saying, with a groan, "De gursed dogtor's stuff has quite spoiled mine eye-sight, so read it to me, read it to me, mine goot voman, but bromise me you will not tell de condends to nobody, bromise

me as you are a goot Christian, and fain you read, do not speak doo loud."

She gave the required pledge, and proceeded to read the will, which was very short, the whole of his property being devised, as we have already stated, to his nephew, Edward Rud-dock.

"Very goot, very goot," he exclaimed when she had concluded; "bot der is a liddle godicil what you will like; read it, read it."

By this addition, which seemed to have been recently made, and was all in his own handwriting, he bequeathed a legacy of two hundred pounds to his faithful clerk, Joel Lomax, who was also appointed one of his executors. The wife expressed her warmest gratitude for this unexpected remembrance, and the sick man, muttering, "Goot, goot, dis will make you gomfordable in your old age — I will egsecute it do-morrow," again thrust the will under his pillow and composed himself to sleep.

How rapidly, how instantaneously, may our evil angel, or rather our own vicious propensities, even after a long course of unimpeachable conduct, suggest to us a deed of which the execution shall totally alter the whole future course of our life ! So far from being inspired with gratitude for the legacy bequeathed to her husband, the first thought that entered the fermenting brain of Mrs. Lomax was the possibility of obtaining the whole of the dying man's large fortune ! Nobody, it is said, knows the weak side of his intended victims so well as the devil ; nobody so clever and discerning in the disguises he assumes for the purpose of effecting his object. That with which he invested himself when tempting Mrs. Lomax wore the semblance of maternal affection.

“ I care not for myself,” she mentally ejaculated. “ In all our struggles and hardships I have disdained to utter a single complaint ; my husband is now inured to toil and penury,

and his spirit is bowed down to his humble station ; our daughter Mary has youth, health, beauty, and accomplishments, with which she can hardly fail to make her way in life ; but my poor, dear boy is sickly, sensitive, and conscientious, with a mind as delicate as his frame, and both totally unfitted for wresting his subsistence from a hard and unpitying world, which sometimes suffers even the bold, the robust, and the unscrupulous, to perish of want. Benjamin, my darling Benjamin ! thy father's health is already undermined, mine begins to evince symptoms of decay ; we are neither of us young, and what is to become of thee when we are called away, and leave thee to the buffetings of the storm, without rudder or compass, without a friend, and without a guinea ? I cannot bear to think of it. Away, away, thou hideous vision ! I should be the most unnatural of mothers did I not do all in my power to save my boy from such a miserable fate, and surely

Heaven itself will look down with indulgence upon a pious fraud, which emanates from the fond feelings of a mother, and has no other object than to protect her helpless son, when he becomes an orphan, from pauperism and anguish ! ”

When we are seeking to indulge a guilty wish, the mind becomes exceedingly quick-sighted on one side of the question, while it is sometimes totally blind upon the other. Had not her judgment been thus warped, the penetrative Mrs. Lomax could hardly have deluded herself with the notion that she might defraud a real orphan, for such was Edward Ruddock, of his inheritance, for the sake of bestowing it upon a hypothetical orphan, who had no other claims to it than delicate health, and an incapacity for the active employments of life. Still less could she have imagined that Heaven would sanction any such flagrant iniquity. In fact, the boundless and ungovernable affection

for her son, which was now agitating her whole frame with impetuous emotions, had not allowed her to weigh any thing but the possibility of aggrandizing him by forging a new will, a criminal scheme of which she had no sooner entertained the idea than her prompt and inventive faculties suggested the means of its accomplishment, without incurring, as she verily believed, the smallest risk, or even possibility, of detection.

As instant and undaunted in executing as she had been quick in conceiving this unprincipled fraud, she first ascertained that Hoffman was sound asleep, and then, gently introducing her arm under the pillow, drew out the will without disturbing him. Aware that she would require it during the whole night, should she succeed in her meditated object, her mind ran with the rapidity of lightning over the various contingencies that might arise during her absence from the sick room. Of these the most obvious

was the probability that the invalid might awake, and search for the will, which seemed now to be the predominant object of his solicitude. To guard against this occurrence, she folded up a sheet of coarse paper to the exact size of the original, and was cautiously insinuating it beneath the pillow, when Hoffman, who was very easily awakened, suddenly opened his eyes, and demanded, in a peevish tone, “Heik ! fot de teufel is all dis ? fot is de madder ?”

“Your head had slipped off the pillow, and I was endeavouring to replace it,” said Mrs. Lomax ; while with perfect self-possession she thrust the supposititious will into the desired position.

“Bah ! don’t you drouble and plague me, but leave me to mineself : neverdeless I most have mine head upon de billow. Hah ! I bote de will dere ; where is de will ?” Extending his arm, he felt the paper, and continued drowsily—“Goot, goot ! it is all right. Go to your

baid, go to your baid ! I have god de bell-rope at mine hand, and if I want any ding I will — ”

The remainder of the sentence dropped into an inarticulate murmur, which presently became a snore ; when Mrs. Lomax stole on tiptoe across the room, opened the door without noise, shut it as softly, and hurried to her husband, bearing with her the will, which she had thrust into her pocket.

In moments of peril and strong excitement, the thoughts hurry through the fermenting brain with such velocity, that she was enabled, short as was the distance she had to traverse, to weigh not only the difficulties she was likely to encounter in bending her husband to her fearful purpose, but to consider the most probable means of surmounting them. Should he hesitate to perpetrate the proposed crime, it would be rather, she suspected, from the fear of its detection than from any high-principled

abhorrence of its commission ; so that, if she could once persuade him of his safety, she did not anticipate much trouble in conquering his scruples.

Condemned as he was by circumstances and the frowns of fortune to a life of toil and self-denial, she knew him, nevertheless, to be naturally indolent and voluptuous—propensities on which she placed no small reliance for the success of her machinations ; and, although he did not share her own headstrong and ungovernable passion for their son, she believed him to be sufficiently attached to both his children gladly to seize an opportunity of promoting their interests, especially if, by so doing, he could essentially, and for the remainder of his life, minister to the gratification of his own desires and appetites. On her knowledge of these particulars, as well as on her habitual ascendancy over him, she relied for success in the nefarious and life-involving vio-

lation of the law to which she was now about to urge him.

Entering their apartment with a stealthy step, she locked the door gently, seated herself in a chair, drew up a long breath, and remained for a minute or two silent, as if pondering in what way she should break the guilty purpose with which her heart was swelling.

“Put on your neckcloth again,” she at length said, with a calm voice, for Lomax, wearied with his last night’s vigils, was preparing to undress himself; “put on your neckcloth, and waken all your faculties to listen to me, for we have business in hand, weighty and momentous business, that will demand our whole attention, and occupy us all the night.”

“All the night!” yawned the husband, with a look of displeasure and surprise; “what can it be? Has any thing happened to Hoffman?”

“Where are the children?” asked Mrs. Lomax, not heeding his interrogatories.

“Mary is in the parlour, working, and Benjamin is reading to her.”

“Joel Lomax, listen to me,” repeated the wife, in a subdued and emphatic tone, “and if you have any questions to ask, any remarks to make, for Heaven’s sake raise not your voice above the level of mine: I have matter to unfold which must reach no earthly ear but our’s, and never pass hereafter from our lips — no, not with our dying breath. You will believe, my dear husband, for my whole married life will attest my devotion to you and to our children, that I would not recommend any such momentous measure for your adoption unless I thought it indispensably necessary to our common welfare. Your interest is mine, mine is your’s, our’s is their’s; but in what I am about to propose self has been my last consideration, or rather it has exerted no influence whatever; for I call you to witness that, in all our reverses and trials, sharp as they have been,

I have never uttered a complaint, never flinched from any labour or privation, however humiliating, which was imposed upon us by our unhappily altered circumstances."

"I always said, Jane, that you bore troubles and vexations better than any woman in the world," replied the husband, wondering not a little what was to follow this impressive preamble.

"My dear Joel," resumed his companion, as she drew her chair closer, and took the hand of her husband in her own, "I felt perhaps as keenly as yourself, but I would not increase your sufferings by useless lamentations. You have experienced how wretched and stinging it is to be precipitated from a state of respectability and comfort into a sphere of penury and toil, with whose vulgar and repulsive occupants your soul recoiled from associating. You have known what it is to be an object of pity or contempt, both equally hateful, to those

who were formerly your equals, or even your inferiors. You have tasted the nauseating bitterness of poverty, I might almost say of want. Incessant drudgery, the contumely and insolence of hard-hearted task-masters, the degrading beleaguerment of duns, coarse and scanty fare, an abode of which you were ashamed, apparel that compelled you to shun your former acquaintance for fear of being shunned by them, privations and self-denial, and all the unutterable loathsomeness of penury, immeasurably aggravated by being shared with those whom you loved the most tenderly, have oppressed your body and soul, until your spirit is almost broken, and your head is bowed down with despondency. If these are hard to bear now, now that you can at least earn the sorry pittance on which we subsist, how intolerable will they become when sickness or age shall have incapacitated you for exertion, and you will have no prospect before you but a miserable

death in a poorhouse, embittered by the reflection that you are leaving your family utterly destitute ! ”

“ What is the use,” sighed Lomax, in a querulous tone, “ of harping upon my unhappy lot, unless you can show me how I am to avoid it ? ”

“ Now, Joel,” resumed the wife, “ mark well my words, and tell me, would it not delight you to have this grinding, this withering, this oppressive weight, rolled from off your heart for ever ? And not from your’s alone, but from our darling Benjamin’s, from mine, from Mary’s ? Would it not rejoice your soul to be suddenly lifted up from this slough of despond, and elevated for the remainder of your days into a station of ease, comfort, independence, wealth, such as should empower you to raise your dejected head, and repay tenfold the scorn of those who have scorned you — to command respect and homage from the proudest of those

whom we knew in our better days — to have, henceforward, no other business than amusement and recreation—to occupy a handsome house—to possess carriages, horses, and servants—to banquet every day upon delicious fare and heart-rejoicing wines—to see your family participating in all these blessings—and when you are summoned hence, after a life prolonged and made happy by all the appliances of wealth, to die with the soothing certainty that those whom you have loved will follow out the same enviable career of enjoyment and independence?”

“What avails it, Jane, to tantalize me with this glorious vision, unless you can point out the means of its accomplishment? As there can be but one answer to your questions, it must be either superfluous or unfeeling to propose them with such an earnest and tempting minuteness.”

“You are right; there is but one answer to

them ; you would hail with ecstasy this blessed change in our fate, if it could be effected with perfect safety, without trouble, without loss of character, without imputation of any sort. Well, then, it *can* be so effected ; with your assistance I can make you, in the course of this very night, happy, independent, rich, all that I have promised, and more.”

“ You, Jane ! you ! How, how ? I do not understand your words. You cannot be in earnest ; and methinks our poverty forms but a sorry subject for a jest.”

“ See you this paper ? It is Hoffman’s will ; I have just drawn it from beneath his pillow. By this instrument, which he purposes to execute to-morrow, he has left his entire fortune to his nephew Ruddock.”

“ I am not surprised at it : some expressions, that dropped from him at Cheltenham, prepared me for this disposition of his property ; but how are your wild reveries to be accom-

plished by the enrichment of Edward Ruddock? ”

“ More than twenty times, Joel, have I heard you boast that from long practice you can so correctly imitate any law hand-writing as to deceive even the original penman. Now tell me, and before you answer weigh well all the incalculable blessings and advantages of the measure, weigh well its glorious results, as you are a man, a husband, and a father, and tell me why you should not sit up to-night and make an exact *fac-simile* of this will, only substituting for the name of Edward Ruddock that of our darling Benjamin? ”

“ Good God ! ” ejaculated Lomax, as he started back, with a look of amazement and dismay, “ forge a will ! Why, it is a felony—a capital offence—a hanging—”

“ Hush ! ” interposed the wife, placing her hand upon his mouth ; “ speak not so loud — utter not a word, except in a whisper, I conjure,

I command, you !” and her features assumed that authoritative expression to which her pliable spouse had been accustomed to defer.

“Are you aware,” resumed Lomax, in an agitated whisper, “that what you are proposing to me is a hanging matter, and that you, yourself, as a counsellor and accessory, would be perhaps incurring a similar penalty?”

“There is no risk, and consequently no penalty for either of us, unless we are detected, and of that, as I will presently convince you, there is not a possibility.”

“Indeed ! how can that be ? Satisfy me upon this point, and I may listen to you with less alarm and repugnance than I now feel.”

“Where there is discovery, it proceeds almost invariably from the treachery of some confederate. Now, in this case we have no accomplices. You and I are identical ; we are one. We cannot betray one another without receiving and entailing indelible infamy both

upon ourselves and our children—a potent security for our mutual silence and good faith.”

“But without any perfidy or indiscretion on our parts we may be detected by others, by circumstances, by a thousand unforeseen accidents.”

“Not by a single one. Hoffman is known to be an eccentric being, an oddity, a humourist, who, having announced that he had disinherited his nephew, is as likely to select a street pauper as any other for his heir. A dozen people at least have already hinted their expectation that *you* might be adopted by him. It is notorious that you are now his favourite, so far as he can love any thing ; the will, therefore, will excite little or no surprise ; it will be a nine-days’-wonder for the world, but a source of happiness and independence to us and our’s so long as we remain upon earth.”

“But will Hoffman execute it without again examining or reading it over ?”

“Yes ; for he particularly wishes its contents to be kept a profound secret from all, especially from Mr. Vandermeulen.”

“You assured me that your scheme could be carried into execution not only without danger, but without loss of character.”

“And so it can. Where there is no detection, I repeat, there can be no loss of character. Who is there to suspect us ? Who can justify his suspicions, even if he entertain them ? We shall gain, not lose in reputation, for the stigma of poverty will be no longer branded upon our brow, and we shall receive that reverence and respect which are never refused to wealth.”

“But how shall we justify our spoliation of Edward Ruddock ? ”

“Tush ! call it not spoliation. How can we deprive a man of that which he never possessed ? Not knowing his loss, he loses nothing. He has gone to South America as a disinherited man. He can have no hope, for he believes

his uncle to be inexorable. He is young, active, clever — qualities which will probably assist him to make a handsome fortune for himself, so that we shall have done him no real wrong, while we shall have conferred an inestimable blessing upon ourselves.”

“But in the very act of executing the will, may not one glance of Hoffman’s eye reveal our forgery, and expose us to instant infamy and punishment?”

“No. In the first place he is half blind, and secondly, he is quite as anxious as we can be to conceal the contents of the paper. See, it is already folded so that the concluding lines alone are visible. The most prying eye and inquisitive spirit will be unable to penetrate within it at the moment of its execution; and we may be well assured that it will be restored immediately afterwards to its hiding-place beneath his pillow.”

Slowly unfolding the paper, Lomax sate with

his eye fixed upon it ; but his bosom was too much agitated by contending emotions to allow him to peruse it with any degree of comprehension. Before his mental eye floated, in gorgeous and seductive array, all the allurements of wealth, so glowingly painted by his wife, the homage that it invariably extorts from the myriad worshippers of Mammon, the fascinations of honourable station in society, the witchery, the enchantment, to a poor dependent drudge, of perpetual freedom from care and toil, the delights of a handsome establishment, of luxury, amusement, and indulgence in all his favourite pursuits and appetites. But, on the other hand, his thronging fears conjured up before him the grisly phantom of detection, infamy, imprisonment, and the final expiation of his crime by a public execution on the gallows ! His mind, which had only partially recoiled from the commission of the meditated offence, shrunk in dismay from the contempla-

tion of its consequences ; his terrors predominated over his hopes and yearnings ; a shudder ran through his whole frame ; and, letting the paper fall upon the table, he exclaimed with a faltering voice and averted eyes, for he was afraid to look his wife in the face, “ Jane, let us go no farther in this dreadful business ; take away the will, and replace it—for Heaven’s sake, replace it where you found it ! Some devil must have tempted you : the consequences are too frightful — a horrible abyss is yawning at our feet. The gallows ! the gallows ! My blood runs cold at the very thought. I tremble all over.”

“ Shadows have often made you tremble, while I have stood undaunted in the midst of real dangers. Are you not ashamed of yourself ? ”

A look of involuntary contempt passed over the features of the speaker, and she was on the point of sharply upbraiding her husband

with his misgivings and irresolution, when approaching footsteps were heard; some one tried the handle of the locked door; and immediately afterwards three gentle taps were given on the panel. Had Lomax been detected in the very perpetration of the suggested crime, his countenance could scarcely have assumed an aspect of greater horror.

“Chicken-hearted creature! are you afraid of your own thoughts?” whispered the wife, in an accent of scornful reproach. “Shut those staring, fear-fraught eyes, and pretend to be asleep; you are fit for nothing else.” So saying, she folded up the will, which she again committed to her pocket, and with a calm look and unembarrassed manner unlocked and opened the door.

CHAPTER III.

“Croakings of ravens, or the screech of owls,
Are not so boding mischief as thy crossing
My private meditations. Shun me, prythee,
And if I cannot love thee heartily,
I'll love thee as well as I can.”

THE BROKEN HEART.

THE party by whom they had been thus startled in the midst of their guilty consultation proved to be their son, a youth about fifteen years of age, whose singular beauty, irradiated by an incipient consumption, of which his parents did not yet suspect the existence, almost justified the fond averment of the mother, when, in answer to her husband's occasional observation that Benjamin was more like a girl than a boy, she would rejoin—“And more like an angel than either.”

A soft and exquisitely delicate bloom, destined, ere long, to deepen and concentrate into a fixed hectic flush, heightened, by its roseate tint, the fairness of his alabaster skin, which was so transparent that every minute ramification of the blue veins was discernible beneath it. His blue eyes, mild in their expression as those of the dove, had already acquired the pearly hue and liquid lustre symptomatic of the insidious complaint lurking in his system, although they did not yet blaze with any of that preternatural and fearful brilliancy which generally characterizes its later stages. In compliance with his mother's wish, he wore his auburn hair parted on the forehead, and falling down in wavy lines on either side—a peculiarity which, in conjunction with his delicate beauty and winning countenance, completed the seraphic character of his head.

Nor were the qualities of Benjamin's mind, so far as they had been hitherto developed, less prepossessing than his exterior. Frank,

gentle, and affectionate, he inspired in all who beheld him the love with which his own yearning heart was animated ; while, for the attachment and the incessant good offices lavished upon him by his parents and his sister during a tedious indisposition, which all, however, imagined to be rather debility than disease, his gratitude was unbounded. Delicate health, and perhaps a secret presentiment that his mortal career would be a short one, had engrafted on his naturally placid and sedate temperament a touch of pensiveness, and an ever-present sentiment of religion, scarcely in accordance with his years ; but these impressions manifested themselves with a sweetness so serene, a simplicity so pure and touching, that they added an ineffable charm to his character, and sanctified the attachment of his relations, whose fondness, esteem, and admiration, were blended with a reverence such as is rarely conceded to a youth of so tender an age.

“I have not forgotten your kind injunction that I should go to bed at an early hour,” said the son, as he turned his love-beaming looks upon his parents : “but I should have had little chance of sleeping, unless I had previously wished you good night, and received your usual blessing.”

“God bless you, my dear boy !” murmured the father, whose voice still trembled from the agitation into which he had been thrown.

“God bless you, my beloved Benjamin !” ejaculated the mother, as she threw her arms around his neck, and impressed a kiss upon either cheek.

“I believe that your blessings and prayers have already done me good,” said the youth, “for I feel much better within these few days, and I hope I shall now soon be quite well. Very, very grateful am I to Heaven for this little improvement, and I pray that I may never forget the mercies vouchsafed to me ! ’Tis on your

account rather than my own that I am so anxious to recover, for I long to make a return, however inadequate, for all your kindness, and to contribute in some way to your comfort. I am weary of being idle, ashamed of being such a burthen and expense to you, when I know how narrow are your means. Mary is only two or three years older than myself, and yet she is always at her needle, or assisting in the household offices. Dear father, do not you think I am now strong enough to take a situation in some counting-house?"

"No, no, my blessed boy!" cried the mother, "not yet awhile, not yet awhile. We must completely establish your health before we suffer you to be immured in a close, perhaps an unhealthy, counting-house, and tied down to a desk. A burthen to us, Benjamin! You are our joy, our glory, our consolation, our chief blessing; and besides, you must recollect that we are no longer in so narrow an abode,

or in quite such necessitous circumstances as formerly."

"Thanks to worthy Mr. Hoffman for all his goodness to us. How is he to-night, dear mother?"

"He fancies himself better, but he is in reality worse—much worse."

"Poor man! I am sorry for his sad condition; it quite makes my heart throb to think of him. I always pray for him before I go to sleep, and this night I will be more urgent than ever in my prayers."

"Leave him to the care of Heaven, and get to sleep as soon as you can," said Mrs. Lomax, as if she feared that there might be some efficacy in her son's intercessions. "Good night, my dear boy! your father and I have important business to transact, and besides it is time you were a-bed." So saying, she again embraced him, accompanied him to the door, locked it when he had passed out of hearing, returned to

the place where her husband was sitting, and, drawing the will from her pocket, spread it out on the little table beside him, while she looked earnestly and inquiringly in his face, as if awaiting his decision.

Lomax, without uttering a syllable, for he was almost equally afraid to accede or to refuse, ran his eye hastily over the paper until he came to the codicil, when his attention was arrested by the sight of his own name. The unexpected legacy, and the praises bestowed upon him for his faithful services, seeming at length to have brought his wavering mind to a decision, he folded up the will, and handed it back to his wife, saying:

“Did you see the codicil, dear Jane? This is a generosity upon which I did not calculate. Mr. Hoffman has been kind to us in many ways. I am aware of your motives in the hazardous proposition you have made, and, knowing them to be disinterested, I can excuse them: but your maternal affection has led you astray. Your

own better and cooler judgment will confess that it is an abominable scheme—an act of the blackest ingratitude; for surely, surely, it would rather become us to be imitating our dear boy, by praying for the recovery of our benefactor, than to be wronging him thus cruelly, and placing a halter around our own necks.”

“Wrong him! how can we wrong the dead?” demanded the wife in a tone of angry impatience; “how place a halter around our necks, when I have proved to you that there is no possibility of detection? Is it your own cant and cowardice, or this paltry pittance of two hundred pounds, that has suggested such futile objections? To what does it amount, this insulting legacy, so inadequate to our services? It supplies one year’s subsistence, and then consigns us to all the horrors of drudging, abject, and squalid poverty.”

“But with an unblemished name.”

“No—with the stigma of penury, the most

degrading that can be worn, for all the world holds pauperism to be more criminal than crime, and wealth to be more worthy than worth. Joel Lomax, you have just bestowed your blessing on your son: you have just listened to his melodious voice, every tone of which, sounding like the music of an affectionate heart, must have thrilled to the very core of your's, as it did of mine — not for myself, but for that dear boy do I make suit and supplication. I do not appeal to you as a husband, but as a father. Benjamin is in a most delicate state. Unless he can command the best medical advice, change of air, nourishing and costly viands, carriage exercise, with other comforts and luxuries which we can never, never hope to obtain, except by the measure I am now urging, he will in all probability — the very thought wrings my heart, and the appalling word sticks in my throat, but it must, must be uttered—he will *die* !”

She had intended to pronounce this word with a marked energy ; but in the vehemence of her feelings her voice broke into a sob, which rendered it almost inaudible, and the tears started involuntarily into her eyes. A moment's pause restoring her self-possession, she continued in a firm and impressive tone :

“ Without my darling Benjamin, I would not, could not, live ; I should soon follow him to the grave, and in that event I swear to you most solemnly, and I call upon Heaven to witness and to register my vow, that my ghost shall haunt and torment you, so long as you remain upon earth ! Whithersoever you may wander, at home or abroad, by night and by day, in sickness or in health, in solitude or in society, I will dog your footsteps, and whisper in your ear, even as I do now—Parricide ! give me back the son whom you have murdered ! ”

The sepulchral earnestness of her voice, the passion that convulsed her countenance, the

sudden energy with which she had grasped his wrist, as she uttered the concluding oath, the imperious look of her anger-flashing eye, and the fearful nature of her menace, astounded the timid mind of her auditor. Cowering and quailing beneath the audacity of her spirit, the irresolute husband faltered out :

“Dearest Jane ! you cannot doubt my affection for our boy ; I would do any thing to save his life, any thing that would give pleasure to yourself.”

“I demand no pleasure for myself ; I require only that you shall decide between the harmless alteration of a will, and the murder of your child, for such it is, and as such will I avenge it, whether I be a living woman or a disembodied spirit ! ”

“If I could be fully satisfied that there was no danger of detection,” hesitated Lomax. “Suppose that we should be discovered at the very moment of executing the will.”

“I have foreseen all and provided for all. I will take care that there shall be a good fire in the room, and if any attempt be made by Hoffman to read the paper, which I do not in the least anticipate, I will instantly snatch it from his hand and thrust it between the bars. We may then be suspected, but it will be impossible to prove any thing against us; we may be turned out of the house, but so we should, at all events, as soon as he is dead.”

“You forget, however, that we should lose the legacy.”

“Is it not well worth risking so paltry a sum for the chance, I might rather say for the certainty, of an independence for life—for the inestimable assurance of preserving our dear boy, who is far more precious to us than life itself? See!” continued the wife, as she drew a large sheet of paper from her husband’s writing-desk, and held it up to the candle—
“this is not only of the same quality, but

the exact same water-mark as that upon which the will is written ! The fates themselves seem to favour our pious project.”

“ Is it, indeed ? ” cried Lomax, who, like all weak-minded people, was a superstitious believer in good and evil auguries, however trifling and vague — “ How singular, and how fortunate ! ”

From this moment he offered but a feeble resistance ; and his wife, by answering and removing every objection that his fear could suggest, but more effectually by recapitulating, in attractive array, all the honours, luxuries, and indulgencies, that it would enable him to command, completely bent him to her flagitious purpose.

“ Your task will be a mere nothing,” she continued, wishing to persuade him that the manual and executive difficulties were the only ones to be surmounted — “ a little powder shaken into your ink will remove all appearance of recency

from the writing, and you will merely have to substitute for the name of Edward Ruddock that of Benjamin Lomax."

"No!" exclaimed the husband, drawing back with an air of more resolute determination than he had yet evinced; "if I am to put my neck into a halter, it shall be for myself, and not for another. I will not risk my life for any body but Joel Lomax. Why not insert my own name instead of Benjamin's?"

"I know not," replied his wife; "I was thinking of nothing but our dear Benjamin, and so his name alone occurred to me; but as my sole end, which is our precious boy's advantage, will be not less fully attained if the fortune be secured to yourself in the first instance than if—"

"Besides," interposed Lomax, "you have heard nobody intimate that our son was likely to be Hoffman's heir, while it is already deemed highly probable by many that all his property

might be bequeathed to me. Possession is nine points, nor must we forget that an immediate command of money may be necessary in case the will should be contested — ”

“ Of that, Joel, there is no fear whatever ; but in this matter I yield willingly and implicitly to your superior judgment.”

The less a compliment is merited, the more highly it is generally appreciated ; it is needless, therefore, to add that the husband felt singularly flattered by this well-timed deference ; and Mrs. Lomax, who, though she exercised upon most occasions an undisguised ascendancy, was by no means unskilled in the wifely art of leading by appearing to be led, professed such an eager wish to be guided by her accomplice, that he blindly followed whithersoever she thought proper to conduct him. It was agreed that the will, which commenced with rescinding and annulling a former one, “ because it had not given satisfaction to his partner, Mr.

Vandermeulen," should be copied verbatim, only substituting the name of Joel Lomax for that of the nephew, and adding, "as a reward for his faithful services, but more especially for his kind and unremitting attentions to me during my long illness at Cheltenham." The codicil was, of course, to be omitted altogether. Lomax, whose apprehensions had been silenced for the moment, and whose heart was swelling with the anticipation of the aggrandizement that awaited him, set himself busily to his task, while his wife, cautioning him to lock the door after her, quitted the room in order to send her daughter to bed, and to revisit the sick chamber, where she was detained two or three hours by Hoffman, who, in his inability to sleep, insisted upon her reading over to him all her recent entries of minute expenditure in what he termed "de betty gash boke." To many of these articles he objected with as much peevish cavilling as if he had twenty years to live and

nothing to live upon ; while the fees paid to the physicians filled him with such bitterness and wrath, that he expressed a double anxiety to sleep, in order that he might forget how cruelly he had been robbed and plundered. Availing herself of this hint, Mrs. Lomax prevailed upon him to swallow a composing draught into which she had infused a double quantity of opiate ; shortly after which she had the satisfaction of seeing him sink into a profound slumber.

It was past midnight when she returned on tiptoe, for she did not wish the sound of her footfall "to prate of her whereabouts," to her own room, and found that her husband had made considerable progress in copying the will, although his hand was no longer quite so steady as at first, for a night-storm had sprung up, the rain was plashed against their window by violent gusts of wind, and the thunder, rumbling at first in the distance, but increasing in loud-

ness at each repetition, seemed to announce that the approaching tempest was about to break over the city.

“This is very awful,” said Lomax, depositing his pen, and speaking in an agitated whisper. “This is a bad omen: one would think that Heaven, to whose eye alone our guilty occupation is revealed, warned us by this terrible summons to desist.”

“Ridiculous! how can you give way to such idle superstition? Heaven is much more likely to approve than to interrupt our pious purpose. Why did it implant parental feelings in our bosoms, but that we might obey their dictates?”

“There is another crash,” faltered Lomax; “it seemed directly over our heads; and how vivid was the lightning! Dearest Jane! let us wait a little; there is no hurry, and I cannot write; I can scarcely hold the pen, while I am

every moment liable to be struck dead in the very act of—”

“Simpleton and coward!” exclaimed the wife in a tone of contempt. “Oh! that my handwriting were like your’s, or your heart like mine! Could I have done without you, I had never asked your assistance. Here, drink off this cordial—it will sustain your sinking spirits until the storm has passed away, when you can complete your task; and remember, in the mean while, Joel, that they who want courage to snatch the favours of fortune can never hope to obtain them.”

The cordial was swallowed, the replenished glass was a second time emptied, the tempest seemed to have blown over, and the writer, encouraged by his companion, had just resumed his pen, when it dropped from his hand, and he fell suddenly back in his chair, overcome with terror at the violent ringing of a bell.

“What are you frightened at now?” de-

manded the wife, arresting the progress of the paper, which was sliding off the desk. "Simpleton ! it is only Hoffman's bell ; the thunder has disturbed him ; but he cannot long resist the potent opiate I have given him. Keep quiet, and do nothing till I return ; I cannot trust you to act by yourself."

With these words, she hurried out of the room, and its solitary occupant remained in a bewilderment of various emotions, in which, however, fear was predominant, until, after the lapse of half an hour, his wife re-appeared, announcing that the invalid had again sunk to slumber, and urging her husband to the immediate completion of his task. To prevent all hesitation or mistake, she stood by his side, dictating the words as he wrote, in which manner the forged document was finished without further interruption ; when Lomax, having carefully folded it, so that nothing but the concluding line and the date might be visible at

the time of its execution, demanded in what way they should dispose of the original will.

“It must be immediately destroyed,” was the reply ; “there is a fire in the kitchen ; we will commit it forthwith to the flames.”

“Who is to burn it ? ” asked the husband, recoiling with a fresh horror from every new step in the enterprise.

“Joel, as we are to share equally the benefits of this act, we will be partners in every particular of its execution. You shall not hereafter claim the merit of having made my fortune, nor will I assume the praise of having showered riches upon your head. Our coming aggrandizement shall be our own joint and equal deed. Take off your shoes ; accompany me without noise to the kitchen, and we will together destroy the only evidence that can prevent the success of our enterprise.”

Although the determined look and calm con-

fidence of her air assumed not the language, it produced the effect of a command upon the ductile and irresolute mind of her auditor, who took off his shoes in silent obedience, and stole tremblingly after her, until they reached the bottom of the stairs, where his companion observed that, as there were only iron bars, and no shutters to the window, it would be safer to leave the candle behind them when they entered the kitchen. They did so accordingly, and, drawing the door after them, were crossing the floor, when a gleam of lightning, emitted by the receding clouds, irradiated for a moment the whole apartment. Clinging in agitation to his wife, Lomax stammered in her ear as he drew her back :

“ Stop—stop ! I saw a ma—a ma—a man at the window !— a tall, thin man with a low-crowned hat.”

“ A man ! impossible ! who would let himself down into the area on such a night as this ?

Your fears have conjured up this phantom. However, we must not run any risks. Man or devil, he shall not long remain undiscovered?"

So saying, she unbolted the window, softly raised the sash, and leaning her head against the bars, was enabled to ascertain that there was no intruder or eaves-dropper in the area.

"As I suspected," she said, again closing and fastening the window, "your terrors have seen more than your eyes. Had I such a chicken heart as your's, we should stand little chance of accomplishing our object, and our darling Benjamin—"

"Indeed, dear Jane," hesitated the husband, "I could almost wish — that is, if you agree with me—that we had never undertaken it. I could swear that I saw a man in the area! A tall, thin man with—"

"And I could almost swear that you are besotted with the cordial that you have swallowed. What makes you tremble thus? For shame!

for shame ! Have you not one particle of manhood in your craven heart ? ”

“The bravest may tremble at guilt, and I am only astonished that you can be so perfectly calm and collected. Dear Jane, it is not yet too late to recede, but if the will be once destroyed— ”

“Look you, Joel, I am not a person to be trifled with, nor to be frightened by bugbears from a resolution that I have once deliberately formed. We have gone too far in this matter to stop short, nor am I so weak and pusillanimous, woman as I am, as to lose the glorious prize when it is within my reach. I will do my duty to my dear boy, ay, and so shall you. You must not, nay, you *shall* not, flinch from your purpose. What ? still peering with a timid eye at the window ? Well, I will remove all your doubts and fears. Behold ! I place this screen upon the dresser, and now, if there were a dozen men in the area, not one of them

could catch a glimpse either of us or our proceedings.”

Suiting the action to her words, she effectually blocked up the window ; and then, hurrying to the fire, thrust the will between the bars. As the paper rapidly disappeared, a bright flame arose, throwing a vivid, but momentary, radiance on two countenances of very opposite expression ; that of the wife being flushed and animated with the anticipation of success, and the certainty that they had now gone too far to recede ; while the husband, as he stood aghast with open mouth and distended eyes, appeared to be transfixed and stupified by the fearful responsibility of the deed, which he had never heartily approved, although he had wanted the resolution to prevent it.

“ All is right,” said Mrs. Lomax, waiting till the flame had quite subsided, when she replaced the screen in its former position. “ We are enriched, but that is nothing, so far, at least, as I

myself am concerned. My blessed Benjamin is saved from toil, from hardship, from poverty, and all its hideous accompaniments, perhaps from death itself, and this pious end sanctifies the means we have employed for its attainment."

"But in the eye of the law," sighed Lomax, "which pronounces our offence to be felony without benefit of—Hist! hark! — what noise was that? Did you not hear a rattling? Some one is trying the scullery door. We are lost—we are discovered! Good Heaven protect us! My heart throb—throbs so, I can scarcely speak."

"Better be silent than give way to such disgraceful terrors. Why do you suffer yourself to be made the fool of your senses?"

"In a good cause I can be as bold as another; but, in committing this unholy fraud upon our dying benefactor, I feel quite unmanned. I am not deceived, Jane; I certainly saw a

figure at the — Ha! there is the scullery door again!”

“Coward! it is only shaken by the wind. Hear you not how the returning storm moans and whistles around the house? Your faculties are bewildered for want of sleep. Take my arm, and let me assist you up stairs to bed. A few hours’ slumber will chase away these phantoms from your mind. Come, give me your arm. How! still trembling! lean upon me; we shall soon be up stairs.”

The passive husband, whose powers of mind seemed to be in a state of temporary suspension, uttered not a word, but suffered himself to be conducted to his room, where he threw himself upon the bed without undressing, while his undaunted wife, who, during the whole transaction had never exhibited the smallest sympathy with the fears and misgivings of her spouse, returned to the sick chamber, where, finding the invalid in the heavy sleep produced

by the opiate, she contrived, without disturbing him, to insert the new will beneath his pillow, and to withdraw the folded paper which she had previously placed there.

CHAPTER IV.

" This hour's the very crisis of your fate,
Your good or ill—your infamy or fame ;
And all the colour of your life depends
On this important *now*."

DRYDEN.

THAT delusive sophistry which sometimes enables even powerful and penetrating minds to blind themselves to the real character of their misdeeds, and to patch up a temporary reconciliation with their consciences, continued to support Mrs. Lomax in the accomplishment of her guilty purpose. So intense, so absorbing, was her affection for her son, that it completely warped and misguided a head and heart which, in any other direction, it would have been diffi-

cult, notwithstanding the natural violence of her passions, to drive or to entice out of the paths of rectitude. The conviction that she was acting without a single feeling or wish for self-aggrandizement, not only made her appear disinterested in her own eyes, but gave to her conduct the seeming sanction of maternal duty, which she held to be paramount over all other obligations.

But, although she could thus hoodwink her clear perceptions on the score of morality, she could not conceal from herself, whatever confidence she might assume when conversing with her husband, the fearful risks she was incurring. Aware that a hundred unforeseen accidents, against which it was impossible to guard, might involve herself and her accomplice, at the critical moment when the will was produced for signature, in a capital charge, she endeavoured to calculate the more obvious and probable contingencies, to prepare for them as far as

possible, and to fortify her soul for the worst, in case detection and exposure became inevitable. Of this task the difficulties were increased by the total want of co-operation. Unable, from the agitation of his feelings, to obtain a wink of sleep, she found her husband, when she returned to their chamber, in a pitiable state of exhaustion and trepidation, deploring the destruction of the genuine will, and protesting that he would not for worlds be present when the forged one was to be signed and attested.

“Nor would I for worlds require your attendance,” was the reply. “That sorry, hang-dog, countenance, fit only for a last dying speech and confession, would infallibly betray us both. Even were I infected with your fears, I should disdain to betray them by a look so forlorn and pitiful. But I share them not. As the crisis approaches, methinks I feel my nerves braced up to confront it without

shrinking. Strange ! that you who have consented to this deed—you, who have thus far assisted in it—you, whose whole future life is to be made glorious by its success — should prove a recreant, and desert me when it is to receive its final accomplishment. Be it so. Leave every thing to me. I am better without than with you ; but mark me, Joel ! if you will not assist, you shall not thwart me. Neither I nor my scheme shall be put in jeopardy by your miserable want of self-possession. Quit not your room. This is my positive injunction — nay, my command. To account for your absence I will pretend that you are indisposed ; I will remain with Hoffman until he has executed the will, or refused to sign it ; and, when I next return to you, it shall be with tidings that our prospects are either made or marred for ever ! ”

So saying, she hastened back to Hoffman's apartment, who awoke as she entered, and de-

manded, in a peevish and weakened voice, at what hour the physicians were to meet, explaining the motive of this unexpected inquiry by adding that he felt much worse, was no longer so sanguine as he had been respecting his recovery, and wished them to witness his execution of the will. This was a hint which threw the mind of his auditress into instant activity.

Although the contemplation of a crime not infrequently blinds us as to its consequences, it sometimes renders us exceedingly quick-sighted as to the means of its successful accomplishment. Such was the case with Mrs. Lomax, who, having observed that the sick man cherished a feeling of resentment against his partner, and was particularly anxious to conceal from him all knowledge of his testamentary dispositions, concluded that he would be much more likely to keep the will closely folded up at the time of its execution, if she

could persuade him that Vandermeulen was using underhand means to penetrate the secret of its contents. Throwing out hints, therefore, of his impertinent curiosity, she insinuated that he had been sounding her upon the subject, but that, in conformity to her solemn pledge, she had made no disclosure whatever, and had professed a total inability to satisfy his doubts.

“Goot! goot!” cried Hoffman, “dat is right, mine worthy Mrs. Lomax. Hah! he is gurious, is he? O de knave, de busy, prying, knave. He shall know ebery ding by and by. Where is de will? Hah, dere it is, I veel it onder mine billow, and dat reminds me what dere are dwo or dree directions I want to give in case I should never ged oop again.”

“I shall be happy to receive any instructions,” said Mrs. Lomax, drawing nearer to the bed.

“Virst and voremmost, you must tell your

hosband, what I have made von of my egsecutors, dat in seddling wid mine partner, he most take care not to be gulled and ober-reached, for Vandermeulen would cheat his own fader. Next, he most write diregly to mine nephew, Edward Ruddock, wid a gopy of de will, and he most send dubicates and dribicates, ontill he hears from him. Dere is a letter from him in my wriding-desk what gives his address in Soud America.”

“I will take care, sir, that Joel shall punctually obey all your orders.”

“Den if I die, I gommand you nod to incur any voolish exbenches for mine fooneral. Onderdaggers are all robbers and bickbockets. Why should they stick a dead man all ober wid plumes and fedders, as if he were a live ostridge, except to swindle and plunder him. I want no black goaches and horses, and tall footpads in mourning, fellows what ought to be all sent to Bridewell. Tell your hosband to save

all he gan, for since it is bedder late than never, I wish to do jostice to mine poor nephew. Dat is all ; and now you need not disturb me, for I will dry and gompose myself a liddle.’’

As the appointed hour approached, Mrs. Lomax, whose collected countenance gave not the least intimation of the feelings that were busy within her, omitted no preliminary arrangement that might facilitate the success of her purpose. Unknown to the invalid, who would otherwise have objected to her wastefulness, she made up a blazing fire, such as would presently consume the evidence of her crime, should she be reduced to the desperate extremity of snatching and committing it to the flames. Pens and ink were placed on a small table close to the bed-side, while she herself, occupying a chair at a little distance, calmly answered the peevish questions occasionally put to her by the patient ; but, resolute as was her nature, the knock that announced

the arrival of the medical conclave occasioned her to start in her seat, and gave an accelerated pulsation to her heart.

“Gentlemen,” said Hoffman, as the physicians entered the room, followed by the apothecary, “for vonce you are wellgome. I am going to surprise you by telling you what you can be useful to me, nod in de way of your profession, bote by being witnesses to de egsecution of mine will, what I have got all ready onder mine billow. Fare is Joel Lomax to put yn de date?”

“He is unfortunately too ill to attend,” said his wife. “He has over-fatigued himself, and I desired him to lie down, and endeavour to procure a little repose.”

“Ah, boor vellow! he has been sidding oop wid me, what has been doo much for him. I am sensible of his gindness, and your’s doo, goot Mrs. Lomax, and you will vind by mine will what I have not forgodden you.”

“Shall I fill in the date, sir?” demanded Vandermeulen, who had slipped into the room unperceived by any one.

“No, dank you—no, dank you. Mrs. Lomax is close to de dable, and she will fill in de prober date. You will vind, mine goot Vandermeulen, dat I remember your hint about your son.”

A sardonic expression writhed his cadaverous features, for even on his death-bed he seemed to feel pleasure in avenging himself upon his partner, for having attempted, as he thought, to bamboozle him out of his property.

In inserting the date, Mrs. Lomax took care so to arrange the paper, as that only the concluding lines should be visible; when Hoffman, who had suspiciously fixed his dull, sunken eye upon her during the process, immediately took it from her hand, and called for a pen. Before he used it, however, he uttered a deep-drawn sigh, or rather groan, and exclaimed in a sorrowful voice:

“ Mine Gott ! Is dis all what a long life gomes to ? For dirty or forty years, since I arrive at Bristol, I give mine time, and labours, and jodgement, droadging like a slave, and denying mineself all holidays, and lugsuries, and gomforts, what I may sgrape togedder, by hook and by grook, a handsome broberthy ; and now, in von liddle moment, wid von single sgratch of mine pen, it shall all bass away from me for eber and eber, and anoder shall enjoy it ! Houses, and stocks, and debts, and bills—I must leab dem all behind me ! Dis is what makes it so bidder to die ! ”

The old man’s withered frame seemed unable to supply a tear ; but the twitching of his mouth, and his repeated hesitation before he would sign, attested the painful struggle of his feelings as he put his hand to the deed that conveyed the whole of his hard-earned fortune to another. With a significant and spiteful smile, he told his partner that he could not legally be

a witness to the will, (insinuating thereby that he was to take some benefit under it,) but that he might see him sign it.

“Will it not be more convenient for signature,” asked Vandermeulen, “if the paper be unfolded?”

“Hah! goot, goot! dat is soon done,” said the dying man, making a show as if he were about to comply with the request. Mrs. Lomax, whose throbbing heart was in her mouth, cast a rapid glance at the fire, and drew nearer to the bed, that she might snatch away the document in the event of a discovery; but Hoffman, who had guessed his partner’s motives, and found a malicious pleasure in tantalizing him, again placed his hand upon the closed paper as he added:

“No, dere is blenty of room for de witnesses, so do you hold it steady for dem to sign.”

Vandermeulen had now no alternative but to do as he was bidden; the physicians and the

apothecary attested the will ; Hoffman immediately replaced it beneath his pillow ; and Mrs. Lomax, delighted that the crisis of their fate was thus happily over, and that every thing was perfectly safe, at least for the present, stole out of the room, and, with a buoyant step and bounding heart, flew up stairs to communicate the joyful intelligence to her spouse.

“ Who is there ? ” asked Lomax, in a faint and trembling tone, before he would unlock the door, which he at length cautiously opened on hearing his wife’s voice, and then, tottering to a chair, and too much agitated to speak, he fixed his eyes upon her with a look of inquiring horror.

“ My poor, faint hearted, Joel ! ” cried Mrs. Lomax, whose gratified feelings inspired her with pity rather than contempt of the frightened wretch before her ; “ away, away for ever with this downcast and haggard wretchedness. Gaze upon me, and let my features, rather than my

tongue, answer the question which you are afraid to put. Are they not radiant with pride, joy, glory, triumph? Hark you, Joel," she continued, bringing her mouth close to his ear, and speaking in an eager whisper, "success has crowned our enterprize; all our wishes are accomplished; signed, and sealed, and witnessed, without exciting a moment's suspicion: the will, the executed will, is securely deposited beneath Hoffman's pillow; the great object of my soul is attained; and my darling Benjamin is made a gentleman for life; and that life, that precious life, will be prolonged by the thousand luxuries and resources that wealth alone can command!"

"Ha! say you so? say you so? Is it all over? are we safe—quite safe? Oh, what a crushing, what an insupportable load have you removed from my heart! So, then, I am a rich man; released for the remainder of my days from care, poverty, and toil; nothing to do but

to revel in all the indulgences of — Ha ! ha ! hah ! ”

“ Hush ! ” cried the wife, alarmed at the almost hysterical exultation of her spouse ; “ your voice must not be heard, especially in laughter, for I have said that you are indisposed. Remember, too, that Hoffman is yet living.”

“ Oh, how I wish that he were dead ! I would give a portion of our new fortune to be assured that he were at this moment buried twenty feet deep.”

“ Why, Joel ! how fell and remorseless have you suddenly become ! It is but a few hours since you spoke of him as our benefactor, whom it would be the basest ingratitude to injure.”

“ Ay, but his life is dangerous to us now ; he may still detect us ; and, besides, we are sure of nothing until he expires.”

“ An event which, as the medical gentlemen

declare, cannot be delayed beyond two or three days, when all will be our's, our's for our dear Benjamin ; and our's, too, as I verily believe, without challenge or suspicion. Had we prompted his very words, Hoffman could not more effectually have promoted our views, for he distinctly stated, in the hearing of all, that he was fully sensible of our kindness, and had not forgotten us in his will—a declaration which must for ever remove all doubts of its authenticity. And yet at one moment I was on the very point of snatching it from his grasp, and thrusting it into the fire."

She related the cause ; when Lomax, clutching her hand, and gazing at her with a look of admiring wonder, exclaimed :

" You do not tremble, dear Jane, you are not agitated : is it possible that you can be thus calm and collected, when within these few minutes you were standing on the brink of so tremendous a precipice ? How I envy you your

courage ! And yet methinks there is something terrible in it. I am almost frightened at your want of fear."

"What are you *not* frightened at ? " asked the wife, with a slight look of returning disdain. "If you could have felt my throbbing heart, you would have discovered that I was by no means so fearless as you imagine ; but at those trying moments I thought of my dear boy, and instantly my soul became emboldened, and I was ready for any enterprize, however desperate."

"You are a brave woman, and have managed every thing most admirably, but still we are not safe until Hoffman is dead. What can he mean by lingering so ? When, when will he expire ? What if he were to read over the will before he dies ? "

"His failing eyesight will scarcely allow him ; I have purposely kept the room dark, and I should find some pretext for diverting him from his purpose."

“If I were attending upon him at the moment, I should be too much scared to know what to say or to do.”

“Of that I am well aware, and you had better, therefore, absent yourself from his apartment as much as possible. As I have said that you are indisposed, you can easily — Hark ! there is his bell ; I must return to him.”

During the course of that afternoon, Hoffman became considerably worse ; his pains, which had quitted him for several previous days, were renewed with violence ; he seemed to be rapidly sinking ; and Lomax, whose spirit was cruel because it was cowardly, could not conceal his exultation when apprised that his decease might be almost hourly expected. To the surprise, however, of all, a composing-draught, which gave him a few hours' sleep, wrought so marvellous a change on the morrow, that, believing he had now passed the crisis of his

fate, he began once more to talk with confidence of his final recovery.

His strengthened voice, and the altered tenor of his discourse—for since the signature of the will his spirits had been utterly prostrate—were most unwelcome sounds to the ear, and awoke dark misgivings in the mind, of Mrs. Lomax. That he should be restored to health was a contingency upon which she had never once calculated, and yet it was by no means an impossible occurrence, perhaps not a very improbable one, for many men had lived for years after having been given over by the faculty ; and, although the invalid was old, he was by no means superannuated. How she should act in the event of his ultimate recovery now became a subject of anxious and gloomy consideration, presenting results, in whichever way she viewed the question, so harrowing to her feelings as to drive her to the stern and desperate conclusion that Hoffman ought not to

be allowed to prolong his life, if it endangered that of herself, her husband, and her son.

She who had come without much difficulty to the conclusion we have just been stating, would a few days before have recoiled with horror from the very thought of shortening the days of her benefactor; but one crime often necessitates twenty to prevent its detection; and her mind, fertile in self-deceiving sophistry, now suggested a variety of pleas to palliate, if not to justify, its dark conceptions. It would be a mercy, she argued, to Hoffman himself, to prevent his existence from being protracted for a few months longer, only that he might endure additional sickness and suffering. Who would miss him, whose life could be so well spared? Where would be the harm of infusing a little additional laudanum into his opiate, and thus consigning him pleasantly and unconsciously to the sleep of death? Besides, self-preservation

was the first law of nature ; she was only defending her own life and her husband's, when she accelerated by a few days the death of one who, if he survived, would become their bitterest and most unrelenting persecutor. And her darling Benjamin, was she not bound to provide for his welfare ? Was not maternal love a duty and a virtue ?

These, and a whole tissue of equally fallacious subtleties, were gradually reconciling her mind to the enormity upon which she had suffered it to dwell, when they were chased away by a fit with which Hoffman was suddenly seized, and which wore every appearance of being a prelude to his dissolution. Animation returned to him after the lapse of half an hour, but his speech had now begun to fail him ; he had sunk into a deplorable state of debility ; and it was manifest that the tide of life was rapidly ebbing away.

As there might still, however, be a temporary

resuscitation of his powers, she was afraid to trust her husband in the apartment, and resolved to pass this night, as she had done the last, by the bed-side of the patient—a determination to which she was the more impelled by a suspicion that Vandermeulen might make some attempt upon the will. Nature, however, would not second her desires. Worn out by sleeplessness and anxiety, she became so exhausted as night approached, that she was obliged to retire to bed, and to despatch her husband to the sick room, charging him to give her immediate intelligence of any thing that might occur, and above all things not to allow Vandermeulen to have access to the will.

Not long after Lomax had taken his station by the bed-side, the dying man recovered his powers of speech, but the incoherent nature of his discourse showed that his wits were wandering. He talked of Muscovade sugars, of falling and rising markets, of lumps, and loaves,

and shipments to the Baltic ; and then, by one of those singular hallucinations which not infrequently unite together the two extremities of life before it is resigned for ever, an apocalypse of his youth seemed to be revealed to his mental eye ; he imagined himself to be transported to his school at Nurenberg ; he named several of his playfellows, as if he were still participating in their pastimes, and, inviting one of them to accompany him to the Church of the Holy Ghost, pointed out to him its most celebrated relics, conversing, or rather soliloquizing, all the time in his native German tongue.

A pause produced by exhaustion succeeded to this strange illusion, after which his senses momentarily returned, and he recognized Lomax, to whom he said in a faint voice, " Ah, mine goot vriend, is it you ? Gib me your hand ; I am faint for want of sleep, but I shall drop off presently."

Lomax complied with his request, and, as he seemed to be falling asleep, he left his hand in his possession for fear of disturbing him, until he himself, wearied with vigils and worn with over-excitement, sunk into a profound slumber by his side.

Several hours had elapsed, when Mrs. Lomax, awaking before dawn of day, and surprised that she had received no communication from her husband, arose, took a candle, and descended to the sick room, where she found the parties in the attitude we have been describing. The first gleam, however, of the light she bore, assured her that a momentous change had occurred since she left the apartment. Hoffman's open, lustreless, fixed eye, the fallen nether jaw, and that peculiar cadaverous look which, when once seen can never be mistaken, convinced her that the object upon which she was gazing was a corpse! She felt his cheek—it was cold as marble; she laid her hand upon

his heart—it had ceased to beat ; and, every doubt being now removed, she roused her husband, eagerly whispering in his ear :

“Awake, Joel ! awake ! All is over ! Hoffman is *dead* ! ”

Starting suddenly from his sleep, the party thus invoked had no sooner comprehended her words, and given a hasty glance at the corpse, than he endeavoured to snatch away his hand ; but in the death-convulsion the deceased had strenuously clutched his wrist, the fingers had now stiffened around it, and the bewildered Lomax, whose terror had nearly deprived him of all muscular power, was unable to detach his arm from the fingers that held it like an icy chain. A second recoiling jerk of the imprisoned member occasioned the head of the corpse to nod at him with such a hideous mockery of familiarity and life, that the appalled Lomax, uttering a long shuddering groan, only to be compared to that which struggles from the

labouring bosom when it is oppressed by the nightmare, stood transfixed with horror, his eyes distended, his mouth open, his hair on end, and the perspiration starting from his brow.

“Nerveless creature!” ejaculated his wife; “coward as you are, you would not have feared him living; why, then, should you tremble now, when he is no longer a man but a lump of clay? Your arms seem to be utterly paralyzed—let mine release you.”

So saying, she deposited the candle on the bed, and, with a vigorous, unshrinking hand, proceeded to unlock the fingers from their hold, a task which required some little exertion of strength.

At this moment the hideous ghastliness of the attenuated corpse, the stern expression of the still handsome female, whose compressed lips, drawn down at the corners, indicated a contempt to which she disdained to

give utterance, and the helpless agony of the horror-stricken husband, all rendered more conspicuous and startling by the full glare of the candle, and the contrast of the deep shade presented by the tall dark hangings of the bed, composed a group which an artist might have delighted to seize, although it would have been difficult to transfer it in its full effect to canvass.

One by one, the enchaining fingers were forced open, and Lomax no sooner found his arm released than he sunk into his chair with a deep-drawn sigh, and murmured in a shuddering voice :

“ His co — cold grasp has sent — has sent a chill to my very heart.”

“ *Your* heart ! you *have* no heart. It is well that I have enough for both of us. Retire once more to your room ; and try whether another cordial will give you a little artificial fortitude, for Nature has bestowed none upon

you. Away, away ! daylight is breaking ; — when you encounter Mary, inform her that the shutters must all be kept closed. Did not Mr. Vandermeulen desire to be instantly apprised of Hoffman's death ? ”

“ He gave me repeated injunctions to that effect.”

“ We must comply with them ; every thing must be done in order. I will proceed forthwith to his house. Will you remain with the corpse until I return ? ”

“ No, no, no ! ” ejaculated Lomax with an alarmed look. “ He cannot want me now ; see, what a mark his fingers have left on my wrist— my whole hand is chilled. You will find me in our room.”

“ Be it so ; and let me find you, if possible, with a look better adapted to your altered condition.”

With these words the speaker left the apartment, put on her hat and cloak, and

hastened to the residence of Mr. Vandermeulen, repeatedly ejaculating to herself, as she passed along the streets, " Benjamin is independent for life ! "

CHAPTER V.

“ 'Twas his own voice—she could not err ;
Throughout the breathing world's extent,
There was but one such voice for her,
So kind, so soft, so eloquent.”

LALLA ROOKH.

ALTHOUGH Vandermeulen was tolerably confident that the deceased had acceded to his request, and made him his heir, he had for some time past harboured a growing jealousy of Lomax, and had viewed with an evil eye the marked and unprecedented favour extended to his family. Hoffman's dying declaration that he was grateful for their kindness, and had not forgotten them in his will, had been heard with no pleasant feelings ; for, although he did not

attach to these words any other meaning than that of a trifling legacy, his disposition was so sordid, that he grudged the smallest deduction from his anticipated prize.

Betraying no emotion whatever at the announcement of the death, he hastened back with the bearer of the tidings to the house, where Lomax, whose countenance had now in some degree recovered its composure, was waiting to receive them.

“You must be well aware, sir,” said Vandermeulen, with a cold and somewhat supercilious air, “that my late partner had no relations or connections of any sort in England, or indeed out of it, so far as my knowledge extends, for his nephew he had utterly disowned and repudiated, and he was not a man to break a resolution once formed, especially where he felt himself personally offended. I am his oldest, his best, I believe I may add his only, friend, an avowal in which I have reason to trust that his

testamentary dispositions will fully bear me out. He chose, however, to affect latterly some degree of secrecy upon this subject ; we know not whom he has named as his executors, nor can we tell, consequently, who will be empowered to give directions about his funeral. To settle these points, the will must be immediately opened and perused ; but, as we cannot give too much publicity to our proceedings, where there are no relatives to call in as witnesses, I propose that it shall be read in the presence of the medical advisers, who have arranged to call here at twelve o'clock. I have not forgotten, Mr. Lomax, that you have some little interest in this affair ; indeed our departed friend intimated as much, but I presume you will not object to my proposition."

"Not in the least, sir, not in the least : whatever you may think proper."

"Do you know where the will is ? It is right that I should make this inquiry."

“After its execution he placed it beneath his pillow, where it will, doubtless, be found.”

“It must not be touched at present; we cannot be too formal in our proceedings. It will, perhaps, be more satisfactory for all parties, if I lock the door of his bed-room, and take the key home with me: I will not fail to return at twelve o’clock.”

This was accordingly done; Vandermeulen quitted the house; and Lomax, whose guilty conscience made him recoil from every fresh trial that might put his self-possession to the proof, immediately expressed to his wife an earnest desire to absent himself from the reading, urging that he might plead indisposition for his excuse. To this, however, she would not for a moment listen.

“No, Joel,” she replied, “this must not be. Knowing your deplorable want of firmness, I would willingly excuse you; but your non-appearance would seem very strange; it might

excite suspicions ; indeed I doubt whether they would proceed to read the will without you. So trifling an ordeal as this you can surely go through, especially as you have some hours to collect your thoughts for the purpose. Enshconce yourself in the darkest corner of the parlour, keep your handkerchief to your face as if overcome by your feelings, say as little as you can, and there can be no doubt that all will pass off well."

"If I must, I must," replied the husband ; "but I feel so harassed both in body and mind, that I would willingly have spared myself this additional trial."

"And I, though scarcely less fatigued than yourself, would as gladly undertake it, were it customary for females, not having any claim of relationship, to participate in such proceedings."

A few minutes before the appointed hour, Mr. Vandermeulen arrived with the key in his

hand ; and the physicians and apothecary, who were not long in following him, gave a ready compliance with his request, all feeling curious to know in what way the deceased had disposed of his property.

On proceeding to the room of death, they found the will under the pillow, when they returned to the parlour ; the shutter which had been left closed was partially opened ; the party seated themselves, Lomax following his instruction in the selection of the darkest corner, and Dr. H—— was requested to read the document.

“Gentlemen,” said the latter, whose avidity for news we have already noticed, “I shall have much pleasure in acceding to your wishes ; but, before we proceed to business, may I inquire whether any one has learnt the particulars of this strange intelligence just received from Paris? A new revolution, they say, has taken place, and one, moreover, which must

produce the most important results upon the destinies of Europe."

"I do not attach much credit to it," said the second physician; "the report comes in a very questionable shape, and has, in all probability, been got up for stock-jobbing purposes."

"But, I am told that a French paper is in town, and it can hardly be supposed that ——."

"Had we not better defer this discussion until after the reading of the will?" interposed Vandermeulen. "We are met here for a specific object, to which our attention should surely be directed in the first instance."

"Undoubtedly," said Dr. H——, adjusting his spectacles; "but, if I had that French newspaper in my hand, I cannot promise that I should not run my eye over the leading article before I read a single line of the will. However, to business, to business; are you all ready, and attentive? Hem!" Assent was

signified, when the Doctor, who was a bit of a humorist as well as a politician, continued: "In that case, gentlemen, the contents of this unopened deed form a fair subject for a bet. Although I have no other ground for the opinion than Hoffman's requesting me to witness the signature, I am willing to wager ten guineas that he has named as his heir a particular friend of my own, a young fellow of infinite merit, who never offended him except by one imprudent act, which on his death-bed he could hardly have the heart to resent. I mean, of course, his nephew, Edward Ruddock."

"Rud — Rud — Ruddock," stammered Lomax, whose whole nervous system seemed to have been suddenly electrified by the sound.

"Ay, sir, why not? What other has so good a claim? Will any one accept my bet? I shall scarcely be a gainer if I win it, for the time I shall lose in reading the will must be well worth the money to an active practitioner."

“ Really, Dr. H——,” said Vandermeulen, with a look of displeasure, “ this levity, upon so solemn an occasion, is not only indecorous in itself, but highly disrespectful towards my very worthy and much-lamented friend. I must request that you will proceed with the business upon which we are met. I cannot listen to any thing that sounds like a want of proper feeling for the deceased.”

“ Well, if I cannot win your money, you will not, I am sure, refuse to lend me your ears. Attention ! Hem ! ”

With a clear loud voice he now read the testator’s opening declaration that he rescinded and annulled his former will, because it had not given satisfaction to his partner.

“ Kind-hearted creature ! ” interposed Vandermeulen. “ It *did* give me satisfaction, singular satisfaction ; I only ventured to suggest one trifling emendation, and I can never be sufficiently grateful that he should so readily

have adopted my hint. But, I am interrupting you ; read on, sir, read on."

With the same loud and clear voice the Doctor proceeded, until he came to the name of the sole and unconditional devisee, Joel Lomax; when the bearer of that appellation, giving a tolerably well acted start of surprise, ejaculated the word "Who?" — an interrogatory which was repeated in a still more emphatical and astonished tone by Vandermeulen.

"Jo-el Lo-max," replied the Doctor, distinctly enunciating every syllable.

"It must be in trust, sir, in trust," cried Vandermeulen, impatiently ; "why do you not read on?"

"Simply because you will not let me. The instrument is very short, though it may not be sweet ; it will not take you one minute to hear the remainder, and I beg I may not be again interrupted."

When the reading had been concluded, the

medical conclave looked at one another with smiles of wonderment; Lomax leaned back in his chair, and hid his face in his handkerchief, as if struggling with his feelings; while Vandermeulen, whose eager, hungry visage, even to his lips, became pale with disappointment and rage, exclaimed in a voice of forced composure, though he could hardly command breath enough for the question: — “Will you allow me, Doctor, just to—look over this — *very* extraordinary—paper?”

On its being handed to him, he hurried to the window, devoured its contents with anger-glaring eyes, turned over the leaf to ascertain that there was no codicil or addition, and then reperused it from beginning to end. Its authenticity he did not for a moment doubt: nothing, indeed, occurred to him upon which a suspicion could be hung. On the contrary, his busy thoughts recalled two or three circumstances that tended to confirm it, and he inwardly

cursed the besotted covetousness which had prompted his objection to the first will. He could now see that a splenetic touchy being, such as the deceased, was precisely the person likely to be irritated by an apparent rejection of his intended bounty, especially if he coupled it with an attempt to take advantage of him, an offence which he never forgave. He could explain, moreover, the sardonic grin which Hoffman had assumed at the time the will was executed. He always wore that peculiar expression when endeavouring to circumvent an insidious adversary ; and he had evidently lured on his partner by false hopes and hints of having acceded to his request, in order to aggravate and embitter his final disappointment.

Although with this interpretation the will galled and annoyed him more, it surprised him less. That the testator should make no mention of his nephew was quite in accordance with

his churlish unforgivingspirit: that, in the want of a more eligible heir, he should select his clerk, was equally conformable to his capricious and eccentric nature. The reflection that he had completely outwitted himself, and that in grasping at too much he had missed all, gave such an additional exacerbation to his feelings, that he could not refrain from exclaiming aloud: — “Scandalous treatment! Infamous! this disposition of his property is utterly disgraceful. His conduct towards me has been neither that of a gentleman nor an honest man, still less that of a friend. Who but an insidious hollow-hearted curmudgeon would have played me such a scurvy trick?”

“My good sir,” said Dr. H——, laying his hand demurely upon his bosom, “allow me, for the first and last time, to quote from yourself, and to remind you that such language is not only indecorous in itself, but highly disrespectful towards our very worthy and much-

lamented friend. My conscience will not permit me to listen to any thing that sounds like a want of proper feeling for the deceased."

"Your sneers, Doctor, are as much misplaced as your jokes and your wagers, and I have no desire to listen any longer to one or the other." So saying, he snatched up his hat, and bounced out of the room, without a parting salutation to any of its remaining inmates.

Great was the relief of his departure to Lomax, who, while Vandermeulen's sharp grey eye remained riveted upon the will, as if he would pierce it through and through, sate in an agony of almost breathless suspense, fearing every moment that some doubt might be started which would fix suspicion upon himself or his wife, for whose presence he intensely longed, in order that she might answer interrogatories, which, if addressed to himself, would overwhelm him with instant confusion. Nothing of the sort having occurred, he rallied his cou-

rage, or rather chased away his misgivings, drew up a long breath, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and, feeling collected enough for a little bit of acting, ventured to ask permission to peruse the will. Fixing his regards upon his own hand-writing, he ran over the lines with a well simulated air of amazement, ejaculating as he concluded : — “ Wonderful ! wonderful ! This is unexpected, indeed ! ”

“ Mr. Lomax,” said Dr. H——, “ I am no hypocrite, and I will not, therefore, express any joy at your being thus strangely enriched, for I cannot but feel that this property, though you are no ways answerable for its present appropriation, ought to have gone to my worthy young friend, Ned Ruddock. I hope Hoffman may be forgiven for the unrelenting spirit in which he died, and I sincerely trust that his fortune may reflect a greater share of happiness and respectability upon its present possessor, than it did upon him who scraped it together.

Come, brother Esculapean ; shall we drive to the Exchange, or the Bush, and ascertain the truth of this news from France ?”

After the physicians had taken their departure, the apothecary, who had been named one of the executors, would have remained to inquire into the nature of his duties, but Lomax, who was in no mood for any such trivial matters, appointed him to call again on the morrow, and ran open-mouthed and full-hearted to inform his accomplice how successfully the dreaded reading of the will had passed off, as well as to claim merit for the great courage and adroitness with which he had acquitted himself on that most trying occasion.

It was not without difficulty, for his confidence and exultation were now commensurate with his previous mistrust and dejection, that his wife could prevail upon him to subdue his dangerously elevated voice : — “ Hush ! dear Joel,” she exclaimed ; “ and remember that,

as we can only be betrayed by ourselves, we had better henceforth place a seal upon our lips, and recur as little as possible to this perilous subject. If we are obliged to mention it, let it be in a whisper that cannot possibly reach any ear but our own."

"But, surely you wish to know all that passed at the reading; you *must* allow me to tell you with what a demure face of wonder I read my own hand-writing, and how admirably I feigned astonishment when my own name was pronounced."

"Subdue your voice, then, so that even the walls of this narrow room shall be unable to hear it."

In whispered tones and a literal *tête-à-tête*, Lomax detailed all that had passed, when his wife, reminding him that she had never entertained any doubts or fears of their final success, inquired whether he had now discarded all his own apprehensions. "I should not have a

single misgiving," was the reply ; " nay, I should at this moment be completely happy, if my mind were not haunted by the recollection of the tall thin man with a low-crowned hat, whom I saw peering in at us through the kitchen window."

" Dotard ! can you still harp upon that delusion of your fear ? You are incurable."

" Would that I could believe it to have been a delusion ; but, if I have eyes in my head, I saw a man."

" Then, it could scarcely have been a reflection of yourself. No more of this fantastical rubbish. If we have nothing to disturb us but the coinage of your own brain, we may henceforth give all our cares to the winds, and devote the remainder of our days to ease and enjoyment. My darling Benjamin will be independent : all my desires are accomplished ; I have nothing more to wish for. Dear, dear boy ! I hear his footstep on the stairs. Shall

we call him in, and communicate to him the happy tidings?"

Without awaiting her husband's consent, to which, indeed, she seldom attached much importance, she opened the door, summoned her son into the apartment, and, after having tenderly embraced him, apprised him of the great and unexpected change in their fortune ; making, however, no allusion to Hoffman's nephew, of whose existence he knew nothing. Sudden surprise, and an involuntary sympathy with his mother's undisguised delight, flushed the features and brightened the eyes of the beautiful youth ; but, in the sensibility of his affectionate heart and his indifference to worldly wealth, he seemed, after a moment, rather to regret the loss of their generous benefactor, than to rejoice at the opulence which had flowed in upon his parents. His features resumed their usual sedate expression, and there was a touching tone of plaintiveness in his

voice as he said :—" Poor dear Mr. Hoffman ! he was always very, very good to us, and I shall ever love his memory for his kindness. It is sad to lose so valuable a friend, and I regret that I had not more frequent opportunities of testifying my gratitude for all his favours ; but, since I fainted away when they bled him, he would never allow me to enter the sick room."

" We, too, willingly acknowledge his munificence, and mourn his decease," resumed the mother ; " but, at the same time, we must naturally feel elated at being raised from our grovelling state into an independent sphere. If I rejoice, however, at this exaltation, it is much less for myself than for you, my dear Benjamin, for your delicate health little fits you to struggle with hardship and poverty."

" And if *I* rejoice, it is partly in the thought that you and my dear father will have no more anxieties on my account, but more especially in

the reflection that you have obtained this great acquisition without struggle or compromise of any sort. How few, whatever may be their talents and industry, achieve riches without some sacrifice of character, or some secret deviation from the paths of honour and justice. But you have nothing with which to upbraid yourselves; you have violated no law, human or divine; you have deceived none, injured none, defrauded none, and Heaven can hardly fail to bless a fortune thus irreproachably acquired."

Lomax and his wife cast a glance at each other; both reddened with a blush of guilty consciousness; both hastily bent their eyes upon the ground; both felt, for the first time, though not in the deadly bitterness they were subsequently doomed to experience, the most painful of all humiliations, that which is endured by parents when they stand abashed and self-condemned in the presence of their children.

Rebuked by the superior purity of their son, they were visited even thus early after the successful accomplishment of their crime with a sense of degradation and remorse, which lowered them in their own eyes—a feeling for which wealth could make them but little compensation, however it might elevate them in the opinion of the world.

On the night of which we are writing, the family were assembled in the little parlour. One solitary candle, the allowance to which the penurious habits of Hoffman and their own narrow circumstances had habituated them, was placed on the table, beside an old clasped bible, and a book of prayers and thanksgivings.

Mrs. Lomax advanced to perform her customary duty of reading prayers ; but, no sooner had she laid her hand upon the sacred volume, than a sudden pang of remorse for the crime she had committed, and a withering conviction

that to invoke a blessing upon herself and her guilty accomplice would only add an unpardonable hypocrisy and profanation to their previous offences, overwhelmed her with such confusion, that she buried her face in her hands, and remained for a brief space fixed in that attitude, without attempting to open the book. As she had wronged a fellow-creature without much compunction, so was she prepared to dare the consequences of her misdeed without a moment's shrinking, so far as it involved worldly punishment or exposure; but her Creator she could not deceive, nor was she yet hardened enough to defy his wrath.

“You are agitated, dear mother,” said the son, with a more than usual tenderness in his melodious voice. “You are overcome by thinking of our departed benefactor. Let me supply your place, and I will afterwards read a ‘Thanksgiving for any unexpected worldly blessing,’ which I have selected as being more

especially applicable to our present altered circumstances."

Without uttering a word, Mrs. Lomax withdrew to a chair; the youth advanced to the table, and, kneeling upon a low stool, read a chapter from the Bible. His rich glossy auburn hair, irradiated on one side by the candle, while the other was thrown into a mellow shade; his delicate waxen skin; his blue eyes, beaming, as they were occasionally upturned to heaven, with a holy fervour; his fair throat, which he wore uncovered, and upon which the light fell with a softened lustre, like moonbeams upon an alabaster statue, composed a picture which only required the addition of wings to the shoulders to complete its seraphic character; while there seemed to be something celestial even in his winning and mellifluous voice.

When he came to the thanksgiving, his awakened feelings imparted a glowing anima-

tion and a more exalted expression of piety to his features. Eloquent and impassioned in its language, the composition he had chosen began by recognizing the signal and unexpected favour lately vouchsafed to them, as immediately proceeding from the hand of Heaven—a declaration which neither of the guilty parents could hear without an inward shudder.

Again, as in the morning, they exchanged glances, and once more their abashed eyes were hastily withdrawn, and fixed upon the ground. The juvenile reader, proceeding to express an ardent gratitude for the blessing thus unexpectedly bestowed, and an humble trust that it would neither be forgotten nor misapplied, concluded by fervently imploring that continued favour and protection of Heaven, which were even more necessary in sudden prosperity, and amid the temptations of wealth, than in the hour of adversity and need. The emphatic “Amen!” which he ejaculated in closing the

book, was heartily echoed by his sister, more timidly and faintly by the father, not at all by the mother.

The two former presently withdrew for the night ; when Mrs. Lomax, after sitting for some time in an agitated and moody silence, as if struggling with her feelings, whispered in a hollow voice : — “ Wherefore could not I pronounce Amen ? I am like Macbeth. Heaven knows I had most need of it, and yet Amen stuck in my throat.”

“ Macbeth was afraid of being detected ; whereas, as you yourself have repeatedly assured me, we are safe from all chance of discovery, though I cannot feel quite so confident as you about the tall man in the area. At all events, your offence, as well as your situation, are very different from those of Macbeth.”

A bitter and slightly contemptuous smile curled the features of the wife, as she took up the candle, and walked deliberately to the door,

whispering :—" Are they so ? well, then, I will enact Lady Macbeth, and so—" To bed, to bed, to bed, to bed, to bed !' "

CHAPTER VI.

“ And darkness be the burier of the dead.”

SHAKSPEARE.

It may appear inconsistent that the hitherto unflinching Mrs. Lomax should have been overcome in the manner we have described ; but, if her fortitude ever deserted her, it was immediately after having safely passed the most menacing crisis of danger. During any desperate conflict, the body is hardly sensible to wounds and injuries, of which the smart only begins to be felt when the struggle is over. So it is with bold minds. Stimulated by peril and opposition, and indomitable while they lasted, the dauntless soul of Mrs. Lomax experienced, the moment these were withdrawn, a lassitude and

reaction, similar to the languor that succeeds convulsion. It was the spirit of resistance that had enabled her to endure reverses, and even poverty, with such an uncomplaining resoluteness. While buffeting with misfortune, she scorned either to yield or to repine. Only in the absence of an antagonist did she ever give way. None but herself could be her conqueror.

Both for herself and her accomplice it was perhaps fortunate that they were kept, for some time after the death of Hoffman, in such a perpetual whirl of occupation, such an unintermitted mental excitement, that they had scarcely a moment to reflect upon the nature and probable consequences of the deed they had perpetrated. Rumour, with her hundred tongues, had no sooner bruited abroad the contents of the will, than Lomax and his family became the prevalent subject of conversation with all the gossips of the city.

That numerous class of wiseacres who are

so far gifted with second sight as to be enabled to foresee an event after it has happened, now unanimously declared that they had predicted this result from the moment that the deceased had taken his clerk, with his wife and children, to reside in the house. In most places, and above all in a commercial city, gold is the fuller's-earth which expunges all spots and maculations. The few who had latterly known so obscure an individual, for most of his friends had deserted him in his reverses, had been accustomed to speak of Lomax as a weak, imprudent, henpecked creature, ruined by his own bad management and the want of proper economy in his wife.

By one touch of fortune's magic wand, he was now transformed into a worthy fellow, who had been dragged down from his proper station in society by unmerited and unavoidable misfortunes ; his wife had become a remarkably strong-minded, superior person ; his daughter,

although somewhat too retiring and diffident, was a most charming girl; and as to the son, such an ethereal being, such a perfectly angelic youth, had never been seen ! Letters of congratulation flowed in from all quarters : the many who had dropped his acquaintance being now anxious to renew it, and the few who had so far remembered him as to return his humble salutation in the streets with a cold half bow, being solicitous to be enrolled among the number of his familiar friends. Duns, who but the week before had pestered him with insolent importunities, now stood hat in hand contending for the honour of executing his orders. If the newly enriched man could have been himself insensible to the great change in his circumstances—for as yet it was not indicated by any alteration in his own appearance or establishment—it would have been forced upon his conviction by the totally altered demeanour of the world.

One of the first subjects that engaged his attention was the dissatisfaction of Mr. Mills, the apothecary, who talked of refusing to act as executor, a troublesome office, with the due performance of which he protested that his professional occupations would materially interfere ; while he complained, with some show of reason, that the trifling legacy almost invariably bequeathed to executors, as an acknowledgment for their services, had in the present instance been withheld. To Lomax it seemed rather desirable that his colleague should withdraw, and leave the entire management to himself, an opinion, however, in which the clearer-sighted wife did not by any means coincide.

“ This will never do,” was her remark. “ That you should be sole legatee and sole acting executor might excite comment, and perhaps suspicion, which will slumber while you are associated with a gentleman whose character is respectable, who has no interest in the affairs

of the deceased, except as his executor, and who is one of the subscribing witnesses to the will. Prevail on him to accept the office, by all means. The house in which he lives, having belonged to Hoffman, is now our's. To us it is of little worth, although valuable to him from its situation. Suppose you request him to accept it, as a grateful memorial of his professional skill, and assiduous attention to our departed benefactor. He cannot then refuse to act, and you will have secured a staunch friend in your brother executor, which a thousand unforeseen circumstances may render very important."

"Before we talk of giving away, we ought to ascertain what we have got," said the husband, who already seemed to have inherited some portion of his late employer's grasping spirit.

"Not so, Joel; we should first consider whether this trifling gift may not be the means of securing to us all the rest."

“Upon that principle I have no objection to be generous; you have more penetration in these matters than I have, and if you think it ought to be done—”

“I do, and quickly, so set about it forthwith.”

The obedient husband found little difficulty in successfully executing his commission. Mr. Mills's objections were presently removed by this well-timed donation, and thus was their first difficulty easily overcome.

The next subject of difference and deliberation was the funeral. Lomax, affecting an earnest desire to conform to the express injunctions of the deceased, although solely influenced by sordid considerations of expense, insisted that he ought to be buried in the most simple and economical manner, a proposition which his wife met with that emphatical “No!” from which there was seldom any appeal.

“Nobody,” she continued, “will believe that

of the deceased, except as his executor, and who is one of the subscribing witnesses to the will. Prevail on him to accept the office, by all means. The house in which he lives, having belonged to Hoffmau, is now our's. To us it is of little worth, although valuable to him from its situation. Suppose you request him to accept it, as a grateful memorial of his professional skill, and assiduous attention to our departed benefactor. He cannot then refuse to act, and you will have secured a staunch friend in your brother executor, which a thousand unforeseen circumstances may render very important."

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by a desire to ingratiate themselves with the living heir, than to show respect to the dead testator.

Instead of being committed to the earth, the coffin was deposited beneath the church, in an extensive range of vaults, of which the meridian gloom was partially dispersed by a few candles flaring in sconces fastened to the wall, and an iron lamp suspended from the crown of the arch. To pass suddenly from the cheerful sunlight, from the bustle of city streets, and all the vitality of nature, into those dim abodes of death, where hundreds of coffined bodies were reposing in grim silence, a dead and voiceless crowd, formed a rapid contrast that might well penetrate and awe the most impassive heart, even without the solemn accompaniments of the funeral ceremony.

Signal was the reprehension of avarice and selfishness afforded by the unsympathising assemblage standing around the coffin of Hoffman.

None cried "God bless him!" except the priest, to whom he was an utter stranger, and who merely uttered the words in the performance of a prescribed duty. Lomax, hating the memory of him whom he had injured, and not altogether free from a superstitious fear so long as his body remained above ground, was only anxious for the completion of the ceremony, that his remains might thenceforward be shut out from sight, and if possible from recollection.

The soul of Vandermeulen was full of aversion and bitterness, as was that of his son, who had obtained some intimation of what he had lost through the grasping covetousness of his father. As to the other participants, and the few chance stragglers whom curiosity had attracted to the spot, they wore serious looks, as became the scene and the occasion, but there was an utter indifference in their hearts. And how should it be otherwise? As the deceased, when living, had cherished no charitable feel-

ings, how should he awaken them when dead ? No sorrows had he soothed, no heart had he gladdened, no tear had he dried up ; and no sorrows were felt, no heart throbbed, no tears were shed, when his remains, not more cold in death than had been his affections in life, were committed to their last resting-place. He had loved nothing but his money ; and that ungrateful object of his idolatry, contributing little to the pleasures of his existence, had only served to embitter the moment when he was compelled to part from it for ever.

To the total indifference generally betrayed by the spectators of this interment there was one exception. It was offered by the son of Lomax. His innocent and susceptible heart, as yet unprofaned by one worldly feeling, and as free from the suspicion of guile or insincerity in others as from the practice of those vices in itself, felt nothing but an unmixed and ardent gratitude towards the benefactor who had given

a shelter to his parents in their distresses, and who had now enriched them by his dying bounty. Of any benefit that might eventually accrue to himself the thought entered not his mind. Adverting solely to the great and unexpected munificence of the deceased, his sensibility, rendered still more acute by the affecting nature of the ceremony, and at times audible in half-suppressed sobs, contrasted forcibly with the cold apathy of the rest of the assemblage.

Far different were the feelings of Lomax during the performance of the funeral rites. Under any circumstances, his naturally timid mind would have been oppressed by the gloomy character of the place, the numerous dimly revealed coffins, the dark mysterious vaults, from which the light itself seemed to recoil in trembling, and the impressive ceremony in which he had been a participant: but the conscience that makes cowards of us all had aggravated

his pusillanimity into a shuddering horror. In some legend or tradition he had read that the evil-doer, standing by the unburied corpse of him whom he had wronged, had been brought to shame and punishment by various preternatural manifestations; and his superstitious mind, yielding implicit credence to these fictions, prepared him for the apparition of a miraculous arraigner, who should proclaim his forgery to the assembled spectators, and perhaps resuscitate the dead body to support his accusation. Every look that he encountered appeared to be that of an enemy seeking his life; every movement startled him, every unusual echo of the hollow arches made his heart sink in his bosom.

With a willing step did he retreat from those dreary habitations of the dead, feeling, when he again saw the cheerful sun, and heard the busy hum of men, as if he had been reprieved at the very foot of the gallows. Even the strong-minded wife felt a load removed from her

heart after the funeral had taken place. It seemed to her, as well as to her accomplice, that when Hoffman was buried and out of sight their crime also was sure of perpetual concealment and oblivion. Well indeed might they yield themselves to a returning confidence, for every thing had succeeded to their utmost wish; circumstances had favoured their nefarious deed even beyond their utmost hopes; not a suspicion was breathed in any quarter; and they ventured to congratulate each other on their certain and absolute impunity. They adverted not, blind and presumptuous as they were, to the various and unforeseen methods by which a just and all-seeing Providence so frequently contrives to expose to the world the secret machinations of the guilty.

Fresh and incessant occupations prevented their minds from recurring to any misgiving thought. It was necessary to wind up the accounts of the business, and to settle with

Vandermeulen, an adjustment which, from his overreaching and covetous character, was not likely to be effected without some difficulty. Hoffman had anticipated and pointed out in his life-time the way in which his executors would probably be cheated by his partner, whose accounts and valuations, when they were given in, abundantly justified his predictions. Conversant with every detail of the business, and well aware that if he settled upon a basis so palpably unfair, he should be sanctioning a fraud upon himself to no insignificant amount, Lomax would have indignantly refused the proffered composition ; but his wife, whose keen knowledge of the world taught her that there were circumstances in which the wisest would be the most willing to submit to imposition, counselled him to moderate his anger, and even to sign and pass the accounts as they had been presented.

“ But why should we suffer ourselves to be

thus palpably pillaged?" demanded the husband. "Forewarned is forearmed; we have been cautioned, by one who must have known him well, against this fellow's knavery, and I would repeat my question, why we should help to pick our own pockets of a sum so considerable?"

"I answer you again, as I did before — to secure the remainder. By admitting the dishonest account current which he has furnished, and by procuring it to be passed, as correct, by your brother executor, Vandermeulen will become deeply interested in maintaining the authenticity of the will, should it ever come into question."

"Question, Jane! question! who is to question it?"

"Nobody, as I trust; but we must be prepared for every thing. In looking this morning over Hoffman's private letter-book, to which you seem never to have had access, I find that

he wrote to his nephew Ruddock from Cheltenham, sending him his forgiveness, and apprising him that he had ordered a will to be prepared, in which he had made him his sole heir."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the husband, suddenly changing colour, "how unfortunate that we had not ascertained this alarming fact before! Had I known it, I would never, never — Alas! our dangers then are yet to come — we have surmounted nothing — we have yet to struggle for our property — nay, for our very lives."

"Our greatest danger lies in your unguarded voice and brainsick apprehensions. For my part, I am not sorry that we have yet a peril to encounter, if such indeed it be, for it keeps my courage from flagging, saves me as it were from myself, and serves to exercise my forethought. I will feel no fear, and want no vigilance, so long as there exists even an imaginary competitor, who may deprive our dear Benjamin of

the fortune we have won for him. If the will be indeed contested, we have only to maintain that the capricious and changeable Hoffman altered it once again, as he had done before, and who shall prove the contrary? Tush, thou pale-faced trembler ! we are safe enough ; but I repeat that I will omit no precaution, throw away no chance, and therefore I say to you, conciliate Vandermeulen by allowing him to plunder us. Let him not, however, suppose that your acquiescence proceeds from ignorance and oversight ; point out his roguery, and tell him you willingly make him a present of the large deductions which you would be authorised to strike off from his account. Thus will he also be a firm friend, if not to you, at least to the will, any reversal of which would not only expose his dishonesty, but subject him to a new and much less favourable settlement."

That this advice was judicious her husband could not have denied, even had not his fears,

now quickened into painful activity by the prospect of a new danger, stimulated him to adopt it. To the great delight of Vandermeulen, who felt that he was thus wreaking the most grateful and profitable of all revenges upon his deceased partner, his unjust account was signed and settled by the executors, and Lomax, being now enabled to wind up the affairs, could ascertain the exact amount of the fortune he had so fraudulently obtained.

One of the few points upon which the public evince an invariable liberality is in estimating the wealth of those who are reputed affluent, since they not infrequently quadruple their incomes, and sometimes make a still more generous addition to their riches. But in many cases their liberality will be found to be apparent rather than real, the imputers of this opulence generally following up their exaggerated statements by all sorts of accusations against the supposititious Cræsus for his paltry

and inadequate establishment, his sordid character, his scanty donations to public charities, or his niggardly conduct to his own kith and kin, whom he might so easily push forward in the world.

In this spirit had his neighbours magnified Hoffman's worldly wealth, in order that it might render more conspicuous the poverty of his soul. Lomax, who had anticipated a much larger prize, and who felt already the cravings of avarice, almost thought himself ill-used, because, being entitled to none, he had not obtained more. Still his booty was sufficient to form a handsome independence, sufficient to satisfy his ambition, even had he been born to luxury and habituated to expensive habits.

"Harkee, Joel!" said the wife, rebuking his preposterous expression of disappointment—"there is as much as we can ever want, and more than we can ever desire, so we will begin by reducing it. A few well-applied donations to

the public institutions will go far to reconcile people to our good fortune. Charity, you know, covereth a multitude of sins, and our's, if it do not reconcile us to Heaven, will at least help to conciliate our fellow-creatures."

Timidity and policy, rather than benevolence, prompted the husband to acquiesce in these suggestions: handsome contributions were accordingly bestowed on the leading charities, and the majority of the Bristolians admitted that the money was now in better hands than in the days of Hoffman, although some exclaimed, "As to throwing away a few pounds in gratuities, *that* was the least they could do, considering how easily they got their money; but they need not have been so ostentatious about the matter."

Only two months had elapsed from the death of Hoffman, when Mrs. Lomax said to her partner, "My dear, I have made up my mind to quit Bristol immediately. All our affairs are

wound up : we are now in good odour — we have won ‘golden opinions from all sorts of men ;’ but the delicacy that has hitherto repressed the curiosity of our neighbours is giving way to a prying impertinence, and we are cross-questioned in a manner which we may be sometimes puzzled to answer. A single prevarication may awake suspicion, and a single suspicion—”

“True, true ! ” interposed the startled husband. “The same thought had occurred to myself. We are living here upon a mine, which is every instant threatening to explode. Let us be off—let us fly immediately.”

“Nay, nay ; our departure must bear no resemblance to a flight : but there are other considerations which would confirm me in the resolution I have formed. While we trudge afoot, wear humble apparel, and occupy our present mean abode, there is no ostensible provocation to envy, and our neighbours may even affect to rejoice at our success ; but when we

assume the style of living to which our fortune entitles us, we shall be viewed with far different feelings. They who were lately our equals will hate us for being elevated above their sphere; the class to which we shall now belong will scowl upon us as upstarts and intruders; both, however unpresuming may be our demeanour, will be jealous of our exaltation; both will gladly contribute to our downfall, should an opportunity be presented to them. Hostility such as this, even if it were not perilous to provoke, cannot be pleasant to encounter. While we are yet in fair favour, let us therefore withdraw to some new neighbourhood, where we are utterly unknown, and where consequently we can excite no such angry feelings."

"I care not, Jane, how soon we take our departure, for I tremble all over when I am interrogated, as I was yesterday by Dr. H——, on the subject of the will. But whither do you think of removing?"

"The house at Bermondsey, which was al-

ways such a troublesome property to Hoffman, is now untenanted. It is furnished, and ready for immediate occupation. Our darling Benjamin, as you well know, has a decided predilection for shipping and river scenery, a taste which will render the abode in question peculiarly eligible. There is no privacy and obscurity like that of a crowd, no crowd like that of London. We should fix our tent either in the metropolis, or its immediate vicinity, for harkee, Joel—" here her voice dropped into a still lower whisper—" our property is now all invested in the stocks, and we ought, in case of imminent peril or emergency — you understand me — to be within reach of the Bank, that we may instantly sell it out, and fly with our children and our fortune to some foreign place of refuge. You need not stand aghast and look so woe-begone. I do not anticipate any such dire necessity ; but, while I hope for the best, I wish to be prepared for the worst."

“Certainly, certainly,” faltered Lomax; “but it is very dreadful to contemplate any such — The Lord be good unto us! When shall we depart?”

“There must be no appearance of alarm or flight in our removal. We will give out that we are about to travel for the health of our dear boy, which will plausibly account for our quitting Bristol. Change of air may indeed do him much good. My darling boy, my precious Benjamin! what would I not give to see thee restored to perfect health and strength! I have sometimes thought, in opposition to our medical adviser, that he would flourish better beneath a warmer sun. He has the look, has he not, dear Joel, of some exquisitely beautiful exotic flower, which pines beneath our inclement skies, and would recover all its splendour in a southern clime, or at least in some more genial atmosphere? I wonder that I should ever have given birth to such a spiritual

creature, whose form, feelings, and intellect, are all equally angelic. O, Joel! methinks I feel a celestial transport as I sit and gaze upon that seraph boy; and why should I not? Is he not my heaven upon earth?"

When the excited mother once gave way to this doating strain, she generally pursued it at considerable length. She did so now; but it is not our purpose to record the overflowings of her ungovernable affection.

Their intention of travelling, and the cause that had led them to it, having been carefully made known to their friends, Lomax and his family, shortly after the conversation we have detailed, turned their backs upon the city where such a total change had been wrought in their destiny, and commenced their journey to London.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Ah ! che per tutto io veggo
Qualche ogetto funesto
Che rinfaccia a quest’ alma i suoi furori !
Voi, solitari orrori
Da seguarsi rimorsi,
Difendete il mio cor.”

HYPSIPELE.

AT the eastern extremity of the parish of Bermondsey, in the Borough of Southwark, and not far removed from the banks of the Thames, there stood at the period of our history an ancient, gloomy, detached building, known by the name of Cypress House, an appellation evidently derived from a large tree of that description which shadowed the back of the structure. The fields by which it had once been surrounded had long disappeared, but its

garden, encircled by a ponderous brick wall, covered with moss and weeds, its old cankered and knotted fruit trees, and its dilapidated stone pigeon-house, still imparted to it the air of an antique country mansion, although the increasing populousness of the neighbourhood, now laid out in roads or streets, mostly inhabited by tanners, proprietors of tenter-grounds, and other tradesmen and manufacturers, had completely obliterated its former rural character.

Placed in his hands as security for a debt, Cypress House, together with its old-fashioned furniture, had eventually become the property of Hoffman, who had at first succeeded in letting it; but, it had now been for several months unoccupied, a circumstance which will excite little surprise in those who are acquainted with the dreary suburb in which it was situated, and have noticed the anomalous nature of the adjacent grounds and the quaint buildings,

which, seeming to belong neither to town nor country, and to combine here and there a farm appearance, or even an affectation of ornamental gardening, with manufacturing processes of no very dignified description, puzzle the stranger to decide upon their real character and object, while they equally exercise his ingenuity in conjecturing the description of natives by whom they can be occupied.

Such was the abode which had been chosen by Lomax for his present residence ; and, strange as it may sound, he had no sooner set his foot within it than he declared it to be expressly adapted to his purpose. It must be recollected that his taste was not of a very refined order, and that he sought other and more important recommendations than local attraction. Cypress House, with its garden and courtyard, was open and airy ; it was in the immediate vicinity of the river ; its roof was surmounted by a small circular chamber,

originally intended for a smoking room, which commanded extensive views of the Thames : these were circumstances which, as Mrs. Lomax was the first to notice, were favourable to the health and recreation of Benjamin, and could not, therefore, be too highly appreciated.

Their son, who was fond of flowers and gardening, as well as of the water and all its concomitants, expressed himself delighted with his new abode, a declaration which confirmed the satisfaction of his parents, and of his sister Mary, who was devoted to him with the fondest attachment. To the timid father, who wished to withdraw as much as possible from the chance of recognition by any of his former acquaintance, this obscure neighbourhood and secluded dwelling recommended themselves by their very want of attraction ; while the solidity of the house, and the massiveness of the walls, which seemed capable of standing a siege, won additional favour in his eyes, for he had not

yet divested himself of the fear that he might suddenly be beleaguered by the officers of justice. Nor did he overlook, should such a crisis ever occur, the advantage of being near the river as a means of escape.

The bustle and excitement antecedent to their departure from Bristol, which had prevented the minds of Lomax and his wife from adapting themselves to their new position in society, or feeling the full and permanent effects of their crime, continued, with similar results, for some little while after their arrival at their new residence.

We have already noticed that the sudden enrichment of the former had rendered him so covetous that he had grudged the donation to his brother executor, and still more the disadvantageous settlement with Vandermeulen, a sacrifice to which he had only been induced to consent by his habitual deference to his wife. Cupidity, however, proceeds as often from pro-

fusion as from avarice. His selfishness made him grasping, but he was too vain and too sensual to be penurious. In almost all upstarts there is a feverish anxiety to display their newly acquired wealth. Themselves hardly able to believe in its reality, unless its externals, made as palpable and conspicuous as possible, be at every moment thrust upon every sense, no wonder that they seek to convince the public of the fact by ocular demonstration, and an ostentatious obtrusion of their grandeur.

From this common infirmity, so weak-minded and therefore so vain a man as Lomax was not likely to be free ; while feelings peculiar to himself gave an additional impulse to its indulgence. Perpetually haunted by a secret dread that he might be called upon to refund the booty he had purloined, and perhaps to expiate the iniquitous mode of its acquisition, he was anxious to extract every possible enjoyment from his riches before they were wrenched

for ever from his grasp. This epicurean eagerness was but a modification of the reckless despair which sometimes urges the shipwrecked sailor to stave the liquor-casks, and to revel in intoxication, ere he is irrevocably whelmed in the remorseless deep ; although, in the case of Lomax, it developed itself in a calm and sustained system, instead of a frantic abandonment.

Under the influence of these feelings, the drawing and dining rooms of Cypress House were painted in gaudy colours, decorated with gilt mouldings and panels, and encumbered with sumptuous furniture, which, if it did not attest the good taste, at least indicated the wealth, of its proprietor. In every part of the establishment a similar character was recognizable. That Lomax, who had never traced his genealogy farther back than his grandfather, where all researches were lost in the darkness of antiquity, should affect heraldic honours

would seem ridiculous enough, did we not know that these gauds are most coveted by those who have the least claim to them. A few pounds having procured him from the proper office an authentic shield, impaling the arms of Lomax with those of his wife's ancestors, whom they were good enough to discover for her (since she herself disclaimed all pretensions to pedigree), they were emblazoned upon a ponderous coach, which from its solidity seemed intended to carry the family of Lomax down to a distant posterity. The horses were of an appropriate strength ; their plated harness glittered in the sun ; and the liveries of the coachman and footman were in that style of showy finery which is not less common in vulgar than rare in genteel life. At the suggestion of the fond mother, a pony-chaise was provided for the especial use of Benjamin, as well as a pleasure-boat, capable of being used either for rowing or sailing.

The narrow circumstances in which Lomax had recently lived, so far from having extinguished that sensuality which was inherent in his nature, had only whetted his appetite for its indulgence, and he seemed resolved to make quick and ample atonement for the compulsory self-denial to which he had so long been subjected. A professed cook was engaged, with orders to send up a handsome and elaborate dinner every day, and a stock of rare and costly wines was deposited in the spacious cellarage of the old mansion, the master of which, in laying down his scheme of life, appeared to have perpetually whispered to himself, not perhaps without some secret misgiving as to the possible consequences of his crime: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Beyond this coarse ostentation and vulgar sensuality, his soul, even had he possessed the wealth of the Indies, would never have aspired.

It might have been supposed that a strong-minded woman like the wife would have objected to a display, which, while it was calculated to excite invidious inquiry as to the origin of their wealth, was little accordant either with their original station in life, or with the scene of its present exhibition : but her overweening affection for her son blinded her upon this, as it had done upon so many other points. Deriving little or no personal gratification from the new luxuries with which she was surrounded, she only acquiesced in them because they threw a lustre, as she imagined, around her darling Benjamin. In him, and him alone, centered all her vanity and ambition.

With a feeling of no small delight, she had already heard him termed the young heir and the young squire ; and, indifferent as she was to the homage directed towards herself, she enjoyed with a keen pleasure the sensation excited by her handsome son, when he drove

about in his pony-chaise, followed by a servant mounted upon a tall coach horse. Upon one point she was not proof against the aggrandizement of her husband. He was the only gentleman, as it is termed, that is to say, the only idler, the only useless person, in the immediate neighbourhood. This was a pitiful object of ambition for so vigorous an intellect; but stronger minds than her's have been deluded by the fancied gentility of inoccupation, a distinction which very often contributes little to the respectability, and less to the happiness, of its possessor. The glorious privilege "of being master of one's own time" is but a sad and barren honour, if it makes its wearer a slave to himself and the victim of ennui. They who have been born and bred to constant employment are very apt to make the discovery that idleness is an oppressive task-master to all those who have not served it by a regular apprenticeship, and become accustomed to its sway.

Such was the case with Mrs. Lomax from the moment that she became settled in her new abode, and perfectly satisfied, in the confident fearlessness of her character, that the will would never be litigated or disturbed, and that not even the shadow of a suspicion would rest upon themselves. Where the advancement in life is gradual, the mind adapts itself to its successive stages ; but a sudden leap from indigence and anxiety to luxurious opulence, even where it is accomplished without any violation of the law, or departure from moral duty, seldom fails to prove that the apparent favourites, but real victims, of fortune claim our pity rather than our envy. The disadvantages of this abrupt transfer into a totally different sphere and mode of life already began to be felt by the mistress of Cypress House. In the absence of any other antagonist, her active mind contended with itself ; her bold defiance of the worldly consequences of her crime could

not exclude a secret compunction and remorse, when she adverted to its possible results hereafter ; she regretted the toils and anxieties that used to preserve her from that much greater evil, the tedium of life ; and sighed still more wistfully for the clear conscience that had once proved her shield against self-reproach. Neither her health nor her spirits were proof against this constant corrosion, which was the more wasting because she refused it the vent of a tear or a complaint ; and the disappointed, heart-withered Mrs. Lomax would have sunk into utter dejection but for her son. “ Thank Heaven,” she would sometimes ejaculate, after having gazed upon his amended looks and more animated countenance, until tears of delight suffused her eyes — “ thank Heaven ! my boy is better ; he is evidently recovering ; he can enjoy existence and prosperity, for his conscience is free from reproach. Pure and immaculate, he is an angel in mind as well as

body. It reconciles me to every thing to know that I have gained my purpose, that I have not committed a heavy sin for nothing. Blessed boy! what is *my* health, *my* happiness, *my* life, compared to thine? I would sacrifice them for thee ten times over!"

The change of air, from a confined and crowded street in Bristol, his morning drives in the pony-chaise, his excursions on the water, the excitement of all his new enjoyments, and the totally altered character of his life, acting upon the buoyant temperament of youth, had indeed produced a beneficial change in Benjamin, which might well justify the exclamations of the sanguine and doting mother. Delicate as he still was, he had evidently gathered strength since their removal, and the sedate, not to say serious, disposition which, though partly natural, had been aggravated by illness, was now relieved by an occasional cheerfulness much more consonant to his age. We have already stated

that he was constitutionally religious, a tendency which, being hardly natural in one so young, had been ascribed by some to a morbid sympathy with his debilitated frame. This does not, however, appear to have been the case, for, his devotion gathering strength with his body, became more fervent and intense as he exhibited symptoms of convalescence. But, let us not be misunderstood. His was not the religion of controversial divinity, or of creeds, forms, and dogmas ; *that* would, indeed, have been unnatural in a youth of fifteen — but of love. He was truly a creature of love. His yearning heart sought to evince its gratitude to Heaven for the blessings showered upon his family, and for his own apparent convalescence, by suffering its affections to overflow upon all animated beings.

In his charitable visits to the poor, he was often accompanied by his sister, whom we feel that we ought to have introduced to our reader

at an earlier period. Perhaps our sympathy with her diffident and retiring character may have occasioned this delay, perhaps our sense of the subordinate position which she always held in the family when compared with the favoured Benjamin ; but, whatever may have been the cause, we gladly seize this casual mention of her name to repair our unintentional omission. No critical judge of female charms will accuse us of inconsistency, when we affirm that Mary was rendered more attractive by wanting that definite regularity of feature which characterized the mother, who, in her younger days, might literally have been pronounced "severe in youthful beauty." With a marked resemblance to all the maternal traits, every thing was softened down into such amenity in the daughter, that, while the distinctly chiselled brow, the full-orbed dark blue eye, and the sedate expression of the mouth, indicated a firmness of character which might

almost rival that of the mother, should a worthy cause call for its exertion, they were accompanied by a clear manifestation of all the gentler and more feminine virtues, a winning affectionate tone of voice, and a suavity of countenance, to which Mrs. Lomax could make but small pretension. Although her hair approached to the dark hue of the mother's, and the fringe of her eyelashes was quite black, her complexion, only less delicate than that of her sickly brother, was fair and transparent. From the peculiar expression of the eyebrows, and the seriousness of the mouth, she wore, when quiescent, a slightly melancholy look, which was succeeded by a smile of the most endearing benignity, the moment she began to speak, or was addressed by another. She did not strike at first sight ; she did not sparkle, she did not fascinate ; but, her winning loveliness, growing upon the affections of the spectator, was felt the more thrillingly, because she herself seemed

utterly unconscious of its existence, and rather avoided than courted observation. Let it not be supposed, however, that, while diffident and retiring, she was awkward in demeanour, or averse from social intercourse. After the first little embarrassment of introduction, which was so trifling as scarcely to be perceptible, her manner was easy, gracious, and endearing; nor were her feelings by any means less intense, because she had too much firmness of character to give vent to them on every trivial occasion.

An undisguised concentration of parental affection upon a single object seldom fails to spoil one child, to alienate the others, and to produce discord between the father and mother. This had not been the case in the family of Lomax. Incapable of jealousy, and loving her brother with the fondest affection, it seemed natural to Mary that all others should view him with the same partial eyes. His amiability,

his talents—for there had always been a morbid precocity in his intellect—and his singular beauty, entitled him, as she imagined, to the exclusive attachment and admiration of all who knew him ; and, being never so happy as when she was testifying her own sense of his superiority, she was rather gratified than hurt when in this respect she was imitated by her parents or her friends. Their lowly condition at Bristol she had regretted only as it diminished the indulgences rendered almost indispensable by the delicate health of her brother ; and now she rejoiced in their sudden and unexpected elevation, rather upon his account than her own.

Mary, nevertheless, was no faultless monster ; we have not the smallest wish to raise her above the failings and feelings, we will not say of her sex, of which it is our pride never to have spoken disparagingly, but of our common nature. The comparative splendour with which she was surrounded at Cypress House, the rich

habiliments that astounded her humble neighbours as she walked abroad, the stare excited by the showy equipage when she was paraded along in the coach, all these novelties exciting a thousand strange sensations in her bosom, had made her heart flutter with delight.

What young person could have been otherwise than elated at a change so startling and so abrupt? Who could have enjoyed it with a slighter admixture of mere selfishness than Mary? Her principal pleasure was the reflection of delight from those who shared her exaltation, and the thought that she should now possess greater means of benefiting her fellow-creatures. There is a charm, too, in the simple novelty of being raised into a higher sphere, which operates upon all, and upon none so sensibly as on the elastic and susceptible mind of youth, from which a certain feeling of vanity and ambition is almost inseparable.

So far, however, as her parents were con-

cerned, the unobtruding but observant and penetrative eye of Mary had latterly discovered unequivocal symptoms of a diminution rather than an increase of happiness from their aggrandizement. Her father, indeed, derived evident, and, as it appeared to her, an almost unworthy gratification from the pleasures of the table, to which he devoted himself with a sensual abandonment that absorbed a great portion of his time and the whole of his faculties, though these, it must be confessed, were never of a very aspiring order. With him the dinner of the day was the chief study of the day; its preparation and demolition became serious affairs; and his indulgence in the bottle, now frequently continued, even when quite alone, to a late hour, did not always stop short of excess. But, to his anxious daughter, it seemed that he betook himself to these gross enjoyments, less from positive epicurism than in the hope of escaping from some secret grief

and apprehension with which he was perpetually haunted. He could not look any one steadily in the face ; if contemplated by a passenger in the streets with a fixed regard, he became evidently uneasy, and instantly quickened his pace ; at any sudden or unexpected noise, he started, with looks and expressions of alarm, which he made but awkward attempts to laugh off when he found them to be groundless ; at times he would mutter incoherently to himself, upon which occasions his daughter had more than once caught the words “ Edward Rud-dock,” and “ a tall thin man, with a low-crowned hat.” If she noticed these signs of mental disquietude, which her affectionate nature prompted her to do, in the hope of alleviating them, he attributed them to sleepless nights or bad dreams, evincing an agitation and an irritability, when questioned, which deterred her from repeating her inquiries.

Under pretext of accommodating Benjamin

with a shorter and more convenient access to the river, he had caused an opening to be made, and a strong door to be inserted, in the extreme corner of the garden wall ; but, in these broken ejaculations, which his daughter, however, unintentionally, was sometimes compelled to overhear, she could not but suspect the alteration to have been made with a different motive, from the often-repeated phrase of “Escape by the new door—on board ship—sail to America—ha!”

From these evidences of a perturbed spirit, Mary, who had noticed them with the most painful solicitude, came to the conclusion that he was a prey to some stifled wretchedness, or living in the apprehension of some imminent calamity, of the nature of which she could not even form a conjecture. As to the possibility of his being harassed by remorse for any heinous crime, it was a supposition that never entered her innocent and unsuspecting

heart. One plausible solution of his manifest dejection at length occurred to her ; she ascribed it to ennui of mind, aided perhaps by a slight derangement of bodily health, produced by the sudden change from a life of incessant occupation and compulsory temperance to one of idleness and luxurious indulgence.

Whatever might have been its cause, she was less astonished at the change in her father, to whose timid and yielding character she could not be a total stranger, than at the altered demeanour of her mother, who had stood as firm as the rooted rock against all the assaults of adversity. Her uneasiness of mind was not indeed so manifest as that of her husband ; she never or very rarely lost her self-possession, never betrayed her inward feelings by muttered ejaculations, never evinced a single symptom of fear ; but still her unhappiness was not the less evident to her daughter, whose perceptions were quickened by her affectionate anxiety.

She had become much more silent than before, sitting often and for a length of time in gloomy communion with her own secret thoughts ; her temper, hitherto rendered remarkably equable by the strength and fortitude of her mind, was now often morose or impetuous, particularly towards her husband, whom she rebuked with an unmeasured scorn, whenever he gave way to fits of despondency, muttered to himself, or betrayed any unfounded alarm. On these latter occasions her own countenance would assume a look of desperate defiance, and indeed she seemed prepared to make war upon the whole world, or at least to defend herself to the last against its attacks, for she caused additional barricades to be put to the doors, invariably examined them herself before she retired to rest, and always kept loaded pistols by her bed-side, assigning as a reason for these precautions that the neighbourhood was not a particularly safe one, and that their plate and

other valuables might attract robbers to the house. Although the family prayers were continued, Mary noticed that her mother never read them herself, as had hitherto been her wont; that she sometimes found it impossible to suppress a groan during their performance; and frequently urged indisposition as a plea for not sharing them—an aggregate of circumstances from which it was but too evident that she participated in the secret grief, although she was an utter stranger to the fears, of her husband.

In the presence, indeed, of her beloved Benjamin, every care and every apprehension seemed to be banished from her mind; and, as she marked his invigorated health, she would abandon herself to a loquacious and ungovernable exultation, as if to make amends for her taciturnity and dejection at other times. But this was not less unnatural in one whose habitual temperament was that of a resolute equanimity; and the anxious daughter, unable to avoid sympa-

thizing with the sorrows of her parents, although she could not divine their source, already began to doubt whether the change in their circumstances which had wrought this ominous effect upon their feelings might not be rather deemed a misfortune than a blessing.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Waywardly proud, and therefore bold, because
Extremely faulty.”

SIDNEY.

“—————His desires
Are dolphin-like, and raise themselves above
The element he moves in.”

SHAKSPEARE.

IN a neighbourhood where the population was neither so dense as to smother curiosity, nor yet so scanty as to allow any new settler to escape observation, it may well be supposed that the accession of a family and establishment such as we have described would excite no small wonderment and conjecture. The good folks of Bermondsey, who, like the majority of their countrymen, measured respect-

ability by the external manifestations of wealth, and coveted a man's acquaintance with an avidity pretty accurately proportioned to the number of the carriages and the horses that he kept, and the taxes that he paid, eagerly sought admission to Cypress House, without staying to inquire whether their new neighbours were likely to prove pleasant or desirable acquaintance. Many circumstances concurred to quicken their advances.

It seemed very mysterious that a perfect stranger, not engaged in any business, and having no connexions in the vicinity, should plant himself in a situation which presented but few attractions to a man of fortune, who had all the world before him in selecting his place of residence. He could not be an adventurer seeking to obtain credit in order that he might decamp, for his house was his own, and he paid ready money for every thing ; nor could concealment be his object, since he as-

sumed so ostentatious a mode of living, and paraded about so constantly in his showy carriage.

Here was enough to stimulate curiosity, and consequently to carry the females to Cypress House, while there was more than enough to attract male visitants, when it became known that Lomax kept a professed cook, gave excellent dinners, and had a cellar well stocked with the choicest wines. The dwellers in that district, who considered good living as the *summum bonum*, could not avoid feeling a profound respect for a man who showed such a sympathy with their tastes, and who, if report might be credited, was very willing that his neighbours should share his good dinners, and join him in his potations.

Nor was this predilection, or rather this instinct, of their palates, checked by any uncongeniality of manners or mind in its object. To be sure, there was a certain degree of pre-

sumption in the over-finery of Lomax's house and equipage, which the men attributed to the vulgar taste of the wife, and the women, for there is a strong *esprit de corps* in the sexes, to the same defect in the husband ; but all admitted that, in their personal demeanour, the new-comers were plain, unpretending people, who appeared to have sprung from the same class as their neighbours, and consequently were not likely to repel their advances, or to mortify their feelings by any affected airs of superiority.

With these various motives to draw them together, the tenants of Cypress House were soon upon visiting terms with a little circle in the vicinity, while they formed a close intimacy with two or three families, one of which we shall forthwith introduce to our readers.

Jacob Bryant, a substantial wharfinger, and owner of a stout brig called the Charming Kitty, was a short, thickset, person, whose ru-

bicund face attested that congenial love of good old port which had so quickly cemented a friendship between him and Lomax. He resided in an old-fashioned, low-built house, surmounted by a large gilt eagle, whence the wharf took its name, and decorated in front with a gay, green balcony, that overhung the Thames. To this edifice he had added a handsome, bow-windowed dining-room, and at the end of the wharf he had built a stack of warehouses six stories high. A liveryman of the Fishmongers' Company, whose unrivalled dinners he loved to extol, Jacob was somewhat overweeningly vain of his own good cheer, and of the famous old port which he could put upon his table when his visitant knew "what was what," although he valued it too highly to throw it away upon a guest of undiscerning palate. Our worthy wharfinger throve well in his vocation, was what the citizens term a warm man, and it was evident, by his somewhat burly

and important air as he sat in his balcony of a summer evening, smoking his pipe, or paced the flag-stones with which the wharf was bordered, gazing at the vessels as they worked up the Pool, that he had an abundant consciousness of his own independence.

Of his wife, a vulgar woman, who piqued herself upon her good taste and her gentility, we shall say little at present, in order that we may introduce the reader to his niece, Helen Owen. This good-looking, good-tempered, kind-hearted, lively girl, having been left an orphan a few years after she quitted school, with a handsome fortune in money, besides other property, had been invited by her uncle, who had been named her guardian, to take up her residence at Eagle Wharf, in the secret hope, for the good man was a shrewd calculator, that she might be ultimately secured as a wife by his son Ambrose.

Young as she was, Helen, who had received

a liberal education, could not fail to perceive the manifold objections to a place of residence where she anticipated but little choice of eligible society, and knew, from the experience of former visits, that it afforded few recommendations of any sort to compensate for this deficiency. But her mind was not too fine for use ; from that vulgar fastidiousness which affects a horror of vulgarity, and which is so often the principal thing learnt at many a polite “ Establishment for young ladies,” she was fortunately free ; she was too sensible, as well as too cheerful, to fret about trifles, in which term she included many of the external forms and observances that constitute the gentilities of life. She loved her uncle, though she was not blind to the occasional coarseness either of himself or his wife ; in a short time she would be of age, and become her own mistress ; and in the meanwhile she did not see what other alternative she could conveniently adopt.

But before she agreed to fix herself at so uninviting a spot as Eagle Wharf, she made one condition which would have reconciled her to almost any abode, in stipulating that she should be accompanied by Rose Mayhew, a girl of nearly the same age as herself, who had been her bosom-friend at school, and had quitted it at the same time. Within three months of that period, Rose, also, was left an orphan, without any relations who could assist her, and almost without a guinea ; under which distressing circumstances she was about to accept a situation as governess, when Helen Owen, then residing at a distance, accidentally learnt her intentions, and, hurrying to her lodgings, accompanied by her father, pressed her, with the most affectionate earnestness, to accept an asylum in their house, an offer to which the timid and almost broken-hearted orphan, who was little fitted to encounter the storms of adversity, assented with tears of gratitude.

Helen possessed great delicacy and depth of feeling, and, knowing the extreme sensitiveness of her friend, as well as her love of independence, she exerted herself to convince her that she was conferring instead of receiving a favour by consenting to become her companion. To this venial artifice, perhaps the only one of which she had ever been guilty, she again had recourse when she received an invitation to remove to Eagle Wharf.

“My dear Rose,” she exclaimed, “I am aware of the weakness of my argument in adducing the favour you have already granted as a reason for your laying me under a still deeper obligation, but the fact is that I wish to try a little experiment. In chatting or reading together, we have often indignantly condemned the slanders of those impertinent scribblers who maintain that there is no such thing as a firm attachment between girls of the same age, after they have once left school, especially where

they are not allied by the ties of consanguinity. Now I want you to refute this libel, and to attest the sincerity of your friendship by accompanying me in my dreary pilgrimage to Eagle Wharf, and the unromantic purlieus of Horsleydown."

"Dearest Helen," cried her friend, pressing her affectionately to her bosom, while her face was suffused with emotion, "I see all the kindness of your heart, all the refined generosity that veils itself in the disguise of an earnest supplication. I wish not to be a burthen to any one, but Heaven knows that the very thought of our separation is almost insupportable. I desire no better fate than to live and die with you."

"Nay, nay, not so fast, my little enthusiast. There is time enough to talk of dying, and, before you even decide upon living with me, I wish you to weigh the full extent of the sacrifice you will be called upon to make. A region

of smoke, noise, and traffic, in the metropolis, and yet far removed from all its gaieties, will be your abiding-place ; your passion for rural scenes and objects can only be gratified by an occasional trip to Greenwich Park ; and, if we wish to extend the sphere of our inquiries, we shall command no better conveyance than a four-wheeled chaise, drawn by a round, strong-boned cob, upon whom I bestowed, in my last visit, the appellation of *Factotum*, since he is not only employed in this service, and as a saddle-horse for my uncle, but is occasionally harnessed to a sledge, and drags sugar-hogs-heads, tar-barrels, and other heavy weights, across the wharf."

" You will be there, and that is enough for me," observed her friend, endeavouring to smile away a tear.

" Remember, then," said Helen, " you have agreed to be my partner, and, so far as I am concerned, I should wish it to be an arrange-

ment with which not even marriage shall interfere. If I am the first to enter into the holy state of matrimony, you shall continue to be my companion, until some discerning suitor petitions for your hand. If you are the first to be led to the Hymeneal altar — that, I believe, is the established newspaper phrase — I shall still inflict myself upon you, until some hapless victim releases you, and fetters himself, by claiming me as his *cara sposa*."

"*My marriage*," sighed Rose, "is an alternative little likely to occur, for who would select for his wife a timid, helpless, inexperienced girl without a shilling?"

"Not a fool, perhaps, nor a worldling; but the man of sense, whom you are the most likely to love, would be the most likely to love you. You are a treasure in yourself, my dear Rose, though you do not know it; but why do you tremble thus, and why are those bright eyes still dim with tears? You must not give

way to your emotions, and distress yourself about nothing, or I shall be half afraid to ask another favour of you. Compose yourself, and recover all your beautiful looks, while I go and write to my uncle that I have won my suit, have conquered all your scruples, and shall carry you with me in triumph to astonish the pastoral swains of Shad-Thames."

From her air of nonchalance, and the playfulness of her discourse, a stranger might have surmised that Helen Owen possessed little stability of mind or purpose, and often promised more than she could perform ; but this would have been a very erroneous judgment. Variable in almost every thing else, she was nevertheless stedfast in her friendships, never making a pledge which she did not scrupulously redeem, and it was the knowledge of this fact that had wrought so powerfully upon the mind of her companion in the colloquy we have just recorded.

To account for the warmth and the firmness of Helen's attachment, we must state that Rose Mayhew was one of those fascinating, confiding, endearing, sylph-like creatures, whom it is almost impossible not to love. Her clear, olive-coloured skin, with the polish of marble, was as soft as satin, and almost as transparent as amber; its whole surface becoming instantly suffused by every passing emotion that quickened the circulation of the blood beneath, while her extreme sensitiveness gave an incessant play and animation to her countenance. Dark, unconfined, and naturally curling, her profuse locks were so apt to fall over her face, that she had acquired the habit of frequently shaking them back, disclosing for a minute or two her high and ample forehead; but it was difficult to admire as they deserved her round, earnest-looking, hazel eyes, because they were instantly bent downwards with the bashfulness of girlhood whenever they

were subjected to notice. The dimples on either side her mouth imparted to it a singular sweetness ; in its outline her face was oval, its usual expression was gentle and timid, the *tout-ensemble* of her features, combined with the mellow tints of her complexion, her slight figure, and delicately rounded limbs, giving her an appearance that might be termed rather Oriental than English.

To a certain extent the same might be said of her mind, which was little fitted for the active duties of life, and in its over-sensibility sometimes deviated into the visionary and the romantic. With much less time and trouble, she had become more accomplished than the majority of her schoolfellows, an intuitive genius supplying the place of study. She painted well, and, when not unnerved by timidity, both played and sang in a superior style, although nothing appeared to surprise her so much as the applause and admiration

she excited. Upon these occasions she would start away from the piano, hurry into a corner, cross her hands upon her bosom, and suffer her ringlets to fall over her blushing cheeks, with a girlish, trembling, bashfulness that had often been mistaken for affectation, a failing from which few persons were so perfectly free as Rose Mayhew. Not content with this unmerited imputation, some of her schoolfellows had bestowed upon her the nickname of the inspired idiot, her diffidence and timorousness being of such an extreme and morbid character that, when noticed, she would sometimes be completely overcome with confusion, when she would hesitate, stammer, and talk as incoherently, as if smitten by a temporary fatuity.

Of Bryant's son Ambrose, who was now abroad in the command of the Charming Kitty, we need not give any present account; but we must not pass over his head-clerk and

assistant, Alfred Hunter, a young man whose troubles and misfortunes, if we may not rather say his indiscretions, had commenced at a very early age. In the hope of improving the inadequate fortune which was to form the sole support of a widowed mother and a beloved sister, he embarked it rashly in a speculation which speedily swallowed up the whole, except three or four hundred pounds.

Urged by the anguish of an affectionate heart, for he could not bear the thought of having ruined his family, he sought a chance of recovering a portion of his losses by hurrying with the poor residue of his property to a gaming-house, which he did not quit until his last guinea was swept away ; when he returned home in a half frantic state of mind, which might have led to the most fatal consequences, had not his unconscious ejaculations and self-reproaches revealed the whole affair to his mother, who succeeded in restoring him to

some degree of composure, and then stole away to Eagle Wharf, to ask the advice and assistance of Mrs. Bryant, to whom she was distantly related.

All mention of the gaming-house having been suppressed by the prudent mother, Mrs. Bryant, after inveighing against the folly and improvidence of young men, and the ruinous tendency of speculations, agreed to consult her husband as to what was best to be done ; and Jacob, who was a kind-hearted man, and in want of a confidential assistant, consented to receive young Hunter in that capacity.

Delighted at the thought of being enabled to support his mother and sister, in however humble a manner, Hunter accepted the situation, although he knew it to be one for which, both by education and taste, he was totally disqualified. Never, perhaps, had a young man been more signally misplaced. Ardent and impetuous in his temperament, fond of literature

and the arts, gifted with a natural elegance of demeanour, and aspiring to a correspondent appearance in his attire, poor Alfred, as a wharfinger's clerk, was engaged in a constant, and sometimes a revolting, struggle with all his previous habits and feelings.

A strong sense of filial and brotherly duty, together with the tormenting recollection that his family had been reduced by his own culpable misconduct, urged Hunter to qualify himself for a business he detested, in the hope that it might eventually empower him to reinstate them in the sphere they had formerly occupied ; but his dejected air, and an occasional irritability of temper, to which he had hitherto been a stranger, attested the deep disappointment and the indignant workings of his spirit. Instead of acknowledging his official faults and omissions, he evinced a proud, splenetic petulance, which would more than once have occasioned the loss of his appoint-

ment, but for the intercessions and apologies of his mother, and the good nature of Bryant, who was induced to overlook his repeated peccadilloes of this nature out of consideration for his family. Although the wharfinger had no very high opinion of his clerk's abilities, or of his capacity for ever becoming a man of business, he could place implicit confidence in his integrity, which formed an additional motive for retaining him in his employment, especially when combined with the recollection that, if he dismissed him, he would probably be called upon to support his family, who had no other means of maintaining themselves.

“Well, dear Rose!” cried Helen Owen to her friend, on their first instalment in their new abode, “what think you of Eagle Wharf and its uncouth-looking inmates? Pray speak your mind freely; I give you a *carte blanche* to abuse them as much as you please. If they were strangers, I should not be so liberal, but being

friends and relations, one may take a liberty, you know."

"Your uncle seems to be a very friendly, hospitable man, in whose rough cordiality, and the hearty grasp of his hand, there is something that has already given me a favourable impression of his character. Nor does he seem so vulgar as you had prepared me to expect."

"Come, come, Rose, you are venturing this little piece of politeness upon the principle of love me, love my dog. When my corpulent uncle succeeds in wedging himself into his arm-chair, (Heaven knows how he ever gets out of it again!) his emblazoned face, velvet cap, and rummer of brandy and water, to say nothing of his discourse, compose but a very indifferent *beau ideal* of elegance."

"They are conformable to his station, and seem to be, like every thing he says and does, perfectly natural to him. To constitute vulgarity, a man must either be beneath the

average of his class, or affect, by some silly pretensions, to set himself above it ; a failing of which I could see nothing whatever in Mr. Bryant, and a good deal in his wife. Her expensive dress, so much too fine for the occasion, that patronizing air which coarse minds mistake for condescension, and her repeated declaration that she piqued herself upon her taste and her gentility, sufficiently convince me that she has but slender pretensions to either."

"Ah, my poor aunt ! you have let her off too cheap, but I have a regard for her, nevertheless ; and so we will enter into a compact never to compete with her in talking of her gentility and her taste. We must believe in them as we do in ghosts, without seeing them. But what say you to our *locale*, and how, think you, shall you like a wharf for your residence? "

"At all events, it is not so noisy as I had expected."

“ Mistaken girl ! lay not that flattering unction to your soul ; it is low water, so that the barges cannot get up to unload ; but, with the rise of the morrow’s tide, should there have been any recent ship arrivals in the river, you will see the huge black lighters looming lazily up to the quay, and will presently catch the hoarse voices of the bargemen, as they throw the mooring-rope round the great stone post on the wharf, and warp up to the wall. Away with all your pastoral aspirations and romantic notions ! Adieu to the matin song of the thrush, and the twittering of the feathered choristers. Farewell to the copse and the grove. You and I are the two luckless babes *out* of the wood, and uncle in his scarlet waistcoat (the only robin redbreast in the vicinity) must cover us, when we die of ennui, with a tarpaulin from the wharf, for want of leaves from the bough.”

“ We can make ourselves happy without the birds,” said Rose, smiling.

“Nay, but we are not altogether without them. We have half a dozen cranes, so domestic that they never move from the warehouse, though I will not answer for your liking their voices, especially when they lack oil. Then there is the large gilt eagle of the vane, which occasionally creaks and screams as if it were crying out for food. And, finally, on the all-important day when my uncle gives his annual dinner to the Prime and Wardens of the Fishmongers’ Company, the Wharf is visited by a fine lively turtle, not of the cooing sort, but of that more interesting species which yields the precious green fat.”

“Nay, if you run on at this rate, dear Helen, you will soon furnish forth an inanimate aviary. At all events, your fine spirits have not hitherto suffered by the change.”

“Heaven forefend that they should! for you take my life when you take the means whereby I live. I suppose, however, they will rise and

fall in sympathy with the tide, for I have often fancied that my uncle's did so. But now, my sweet little *Rose de Meaux*, (I must not forget the nick-name I gave you at school) now comes an inquiry which, though the last, is by no means the least. How like you my uncle's Factotum?—no, that epithet belongs to the brown cob—how like you his *Homme d'affaires*, his managing clerk, Alfred Hunter, who seems, by his bearing, to think that the word Esquire should already be added to his name, and sooth to say, his looks qualify him to enact the part of squire to the knight of the rueful visage."

"I know by experience that you spare none when you indulge in this vein of ridicule and banter; but I cannot see any thing in Mr. Hunter that should justly exercise your powers of raillery. To me he seems a remarkably interesting and intelligent young man, so far as his modest and reserved manners would allow me to judge."

“Interesting ! that term is so universally bestowed upon man, woman, and child, when no more definite eulogy can be applied, that I consider it a disparagement rather than a praise. I hate an interesting young man, I am not quite sure that I like a modest—alias, a sheepfaced one — and as to the reserve for which you give credit to this grave-looking wielder of the quill, it is nothing in the world but pride. It is not want of self-possession, for his deportment is unembarrassed enough, nor the diffidence of one who fears that he is beneath his company, but rather the cold distance of a man who fancies himself superior to his associates, and is ashamed of his situation. The young hero is a decayed gentleman, it seems. Did you observe how his cheeks reddened, and his eyes flashed, when uncle reminded him that he had twice omitted to call at the Custom House, and told him that his

wits, if he had any, were always a wool-gathering?"

"I did, and I could not help sympathising with his feelings, which were evidently very much hurt at his being thus rebuked before strangers."

"My dear Mimosa! (I never forget, you see, any of your nick-names) you would have sympathised with Hogarth's idle apprentice whenever his neglect got him into a scrape. Many, I suspect, will be your palpitations of the heart, if you are to compassionate Mr. Hunter every time uncle takes him to task, for I have reason to believe that they do not agree very well together."

"I am both sorry and surprised to hear it. He is very good-looking, and such a fine figure; don't you think so?"

"What, uncle? No; his nose is too red, and his stomach too capacious."

"Ridiculous! I was alluding to Mr. Hunter.

He has a very picturesque head, and his eyes are the most expressive I ever saw."

"Why the man's a man, as Volante says ; but the fact is that I think nobody good-looking who wears a woe-begone countenance. I have a natural, perhaps I should rather say an unnatural, or at least an unfeeling, antipathy to the tristful and dolorous."

"Not unfeeling, dearest Helen ; for oh ! how tenderly have you loved and comforted me when I was unhappy !"

"But I positively doat upon you when you are cheerful ; so prithee do not sympathise so far with this grave, but not very reverend, signor, as to acquire his lackadaisical look."

There was a pause of some minutes, when Rose, who seemed to be interested in the subject upon which they had been discoursing, recurred to it by saying, "Surely, Helen, you will not deny that he was well dressed."

"I did not notice him so narrowly as

you appear to have done, but methought the style of his attire was hardly appropriate to a wharfinger's clerk, and affected an air of fashion which the wearer found it difficult to maintain."

"If I unconsciously disparaged him by saying that he was interesting, are you not paying him an unintentional compliment by admitting that his manners and appearance are superior to his station. Besides, you forget that he has been educated with much better prospects, so that, instead of assuming any airs of pretension, the fact is that he has not yet been able to acquire a proper degree of homeliness for his new station."

"Most logically urged, I must confess. What counsellor without a fee would have made out half so good a case? You are so prompt in his defence that I will not venture to attack him again till —— to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER IX.

“ These spirits of sense, in fantasy’s high court,
Judge of the forms of objects, ill or well ;
And so do they send a good or ill report
Down to the heart, where all affections dwell.”

ALTHOUGH Helen was not sincere in her censure of Alfred Hunter, she had accidentally stumbled upon the truth when she affirmed that his reserve proceeded from pride rather than diffidence. An anxiety to avoid altercation with Mr. Bryant, for he felt the imprudence of alienating his only friend, led him to take refuge in an habitual silence, sometimes so strictly, we had almost said so sullenly, preserved as to be scarcely less offensive than the petulance for which it was substituted. In this, as in other matters, his hasty feelings and rash judgment led

him astray when he took the greatest pains to pursue the right path, and as the best things perverted often become the worst, so would it sometimes happen that his most amiable feelings occasioned his greatest errors. Already had he impoverished his family from an over-anxiety to enrich it, and yet he would still secretly hoard up a trifle from his scanty earnings to purchase a lottery-ticket, in the hope of procuring some additional comfort for his mother, or obtaining a small marriage-portion for his sister. It is scarcely necessary to state that he invariably drew a blank, and yet he suffered himself to be repeatedly pilfered by the same juggle, every fresh disappointment acting injuriously upon his temper and increasing his dejection, without curing him of his delusion. Thus parsimonious and extravagant, sanguine and despondent, peevish and good-tempered by turns ; unable to qualify himself for his station, and yet indignant when reminded of his neg-

lect or incompetency ; too poor to be a gentleman, and too proud to submit with a good grace to poverty, his life was a conflict of opposite feelings, and his character an apparent anomaly.

Although he had at first exhibited a distant, almost a haughty, reserve towards the new inmates, anticipating that they would prove giggling girls, who would look down upon an humble clerk with something like contempt, or who would at all events think they conferred an honour in noticing him, his coldness rapidly wore off when he found that they not only comported themselves towards him with a polite affability, but even seemed to seek occasions for treating him with a marked respect. The jealousy which anticipates and resents the superiority of another, even though it be not manifested, and which in the victims of misfortune is so apt to degenerate into an unsocial pride, now melted away like snow before the

sun ; and Hunter, delighted with the discovery that the fair visitants possessed accomplished and congenial minds, exerted himself to make atonement for the injustice of his first impressions.

Of Helen, whose vivacity was rather too exuberant to assimilate with his depressed temperament, and whose satirical vein, softened into the appellation of quizzing, though always exercised with good humour, was not very discriminating in its range, he still stood in some degree of awe ; for his dependant situation, the remembrance of which perpetually haunted him, would not allow him to compete with her, even had he possessed spirits for making the attempt ; and he hesitated to laugh at the bad jokes in which she delighted, lest it should be thought he was taking a liberty, or seeking to place himself upon a par with the young heiress, as Mrs. Bryant always called her. His demeanour, therefore, although no longer cold and repelling, exhibited the con-

straint of one who, not feeling quite sure of his position, fears to make or even to reciprocate, any advances towards familiarity.

With Rose Mayhew, however, he felt himself on a footing of comparative ease and intimacy. There was something so winning in her retiring girlishness, and beautiful confusion; her manner, when she addressed him, was so gentle, gracious, and confiding; and her views and opinions, when he could succeed in drawing them out, were so much in unison with his own, that he quickly found a charm in her society which tended more to reconcile him to his situation than all the considerations of prudence and duty. Even Eagle Wharf, with its vulgar and revolting accessories, was rendered more endurable to him by some remarks which she dropped, perhaps with that benevolent object, on his expressing an apprehension that so ardent an admirer of nature and of the picturesque as Miss Mayhew could find very little

to interest her in that unattractive neighbourhood.

“I thought so at first,” blushed Rose. “The wharf and its concomitants, together with the whole noisy and bustling vicinity, appeared to me terribly prosaic—pardon me, dear Helen, for using that word, it is expressive to *my* mind, whatever it may appear to *your’s*—but a short experience has convinced me that there are few scenes or elements, however unpromising, out of which, with the help of a little imagination, we may not extract something poetical and romantic. Objects naturally unlovely, or even repulsive, may be made morally picturesque if we do but place them in a new light, or operate upon them with our mental alchemy. The irresistible and yet obedient river, for instance, that runs, not unmusically beneath our windows, and which I have heard stigmatized as a mass of muddy and offensive waters, how does it become elevated in our minds when we view it as

the medium of communication between the most distant nations, and consequently as one of the great civilizers of the world : as a silent, dustless road, which, regularly rising and falling, flowing backwards and forwards, receives no reparation, and yet remains for ever the same ; a road so soft that we can plunge our bodies into its depths, and over which, nevertheless, weights that would crush a solid rock are drawn by the winged coursers of the air, or impelled at full speed by an impalpable vapour."

"When you have fairly thrown the reins upon the neck of your imagination," cried Helen, "I know by experience that we have nothing to do but to let you gallop away until you are out of breath."

"May I beseech you not to interrupt your friend?" whispered Hunter, impatiently, "for methinks I already begin to look upon this turbid stream with a reverence to which I have hitherto been a stranger."

“Every thing,” resumed Rose, “may thus be sublimized if we will but lift it out of its materiality by means of its associations. The Thames is an enchanted mirror, each of whose myriad reflections is a copious history. Oh, if we could but translate the whispers of the waves as they murmur to one another beneath our balcony, what materials would they furnish forth for a whole world of thought! What wonders could they reveal to us of the vasty and mysterious deep! They have been the playthings, perchance, of unknown monsters in the fathomless caverns of the Pacific, or spouted into the air by the Northern whale; now laving the coral rocks of undiscovered islands; now speeding the packet on its way, and assisting to “waft a sigh from Indus to the Pole.” Some have swept the shipwrecked mariner from his plank, and stifled his expiring cry—some have buoyed him up and borne him to a place of safety—some have but lately re-

flected the gay banner, and echoed to the merry music of the laughing water-party, while others may yet be warm with the last breath or the convulsive clutch of the drowning suicide."

The enthusiast paused — but her auditors, both of whom were now equally averse from turning the flow of her ideas by a comment, remained gazing at her without speaking, a silence which seemed suddenly to have brought her to herself, for she started, coloured deeply, and exclaimed, in an altered voice, "Good Heavens ! how have I been babbling ! I fear I have uttered a sad rhapsody. I was scarcely aware that—Helen, Helen ! why, why did you not check me ! The river—did I wander ? what river ? —Who talked of a drowned suicide ? —How *could* I be so silly ?"

Her confusion becoming increased by her nervous anxiety to escape from it, she continued to ejaculate in a still more incoherent strain, until she suddenly paused, shook her profuse

locks over her glowing face, ran to a corner of the room, crossed her hands upon her bosom, and sat cowering and trembling as if she had committed some grievous offence for which she expected immediate punishment.

“Not for the world would I have checked these wild overflowings of your fancy,” said her friend, following her. “You have uttered nothing that does not increase my admiration, so prythee let not that pretty face of thine be any longer hidden.”

“You are such an incurable banterer,” panted Rose, “that I must peep first, to be quite sure that you are not laughing at me.” So saying, she shook back a portion of her hair, revealing first her white teeth, like lilies gleaming beneath the pendent branches of a cypress, and then her eyes twinkling like stars through the openings of a dark cloud, until she finally suffered the whole beauty of her face to emerge, even as a fairy steals timidly forth from her

leafy bower. "Unkind Helen!" she continued, recovering herself, "how *could* you see my Pegasus running away with me, and not make a single snatch at his bridle?" On perceiving their companions, of whose presence she seemed for the moment to have been unaware, her eyes were instantly bent to the ground—she clasped her hands together, exclaiming in a soft supplicating tone, while a thousand blushing apparitions suffused her face and bosom, "Pray, pray forgive me, Mr. Hunter, I quite forgot myself," and, so saying, she vanished from the room like a flying sylph.

"What a beautiful, what a gifted creature!" cried Hunter, in an impassioned voice. "She has all the loveliness, and more than all the talent, of a Grecian Pythoness, for her's is the inspiration of genius."

"She is indeed a most extraordinary girl," said Helen; "but though I admire, I am not quite sure that I like these enthusiastic day-dreams

of her imagination, for she is so delicate and so sensitive, that the least over-excitement of her mental powers, even where her feelings are not interested, is apt to produce an agitation which she finds it difficult to allay. She has been sometimes thrown into a fever by the perusal of an affecting novel, and I dare affirm that her little heart is beating at this moment as if it would knock down the walls of its prison. I must hasten to tranquillize her."

"Is she a spirit, or a being of real flesh and blood, like ourselves?" soliloquised Hunter, in a tone of delighted wonderment. "Surely she must be some winged Ariel, who hath alighted upon this inappropriate spot to bewitch us with admiration before she pursues her flight to her enchanted isle?"

In this strain he was rhapsodizing, when his reverie was dispersed by the rough voice of Bryant, crying out from below, "Hilloa, Mr. Hunter! where the deuce have you got to?"

Here's an order from Higgins and Spratt for the twenty-two casks of tallow, and you must see them weighed and delivered immediately."

"So ends my pleasant dream," muttered the clerk between his clenched teeth; "and now for the hateful, the disgusting realities of Eagle Wharf. I am a clerk, a servant, a slave, and must resume my drudgery at the bidding of the overseer."

So saying, he betook himself to the warehouse, where, with an indignant heart, and looks that betrayed his aversion, he performed his distasteful task. If he discharged it without making any mistakes, it must be attributed to chance rather than to the sedulity of his attention, since his thoughts, during the whole process, were with Rose Mayhew, a direction from which they rarely deviated for several following days, although in that period he saw very little of the object that engrossed them. The timid girl, imagining that she had not maintained a

proper reserve in their last interview, avoided his presence, until she was rallied out of her coyness by her friend, who reminded her that to fly without a reason wore very much the appearance of inviting pursuit.

CHAPTER X.

“ We ’re both love’s captives, but with fate so cross,
One must be happy by the other’s loss.”

SHAKSPEARE.

No man who has once had a reputation for cleverness forgets to fancy himself as vigorous as ever in his intellect ; and no *çi-devant* Belle either loves the recollection of her former beauty, or can be brought to believe that she has quite survived it. In this latter category must be placed Mrs. Bryant, who, having once possessed the complexional red and white of a milkmaid, with a crumby figure to match, had been thought good-looking, and still considered herself in that predicament, although her frame had assumed a shapeless rotundity, and her

coarse face had lost whatever attractions it might formerly have boasted.

She still, therefore, affected a youthful style of dress, which gave a ludicrous incongruity to her appearance, and, valuing herself upon her taste, fell into the usual mistake of the vulgar, by lapsing into finery, a whole summer-house of flowers usually flaunting in her cap or bonnet, her person being bedizened with ornaments and gold chains, and her fat red fingers screwed into showy rings, which looked, by the swelling of the flesh around them, as if they never could be got off again. Of any great redundancy of necklaces we are happy to be enabled to acquit her, for, her head being placed upon her shoulders without the intervention of more than an inch of throat, there was but a very limited scope for their display.

Attired in this fashion, she made her way one morning into the drawing-room, wearing

such an evident look of discomposure that Helen immediately inquired its cause.

“Why, my dear,” was the reply, “it’s only the old story, and yet I cannot help being vexed at it. Mr. B., he has been complaining again of Mr. Hunter for inattention and forgetfulness, and what not, and, as I know he keeps him solely out of regard to me, though he can hardly be called a relation of mine, only a very distant connexion, and I have persuaded him to overlook many things done by him, or omitted to be done, which is all the same, yet he and him are always a-bickering, which is particular unpleasant, and I must say the young man does not by any means treat him with proper respect.”

Knowing that her aunt entertained too good an opinion of herself to suspect any one of quizzing her, Helen would sometimes venture on such an open strain of banter, that her timid friend sate upon tenterhooks in the apprehen-

sion of her being detected, a confusion that only excited her sportive tormentor to a still more palpable raillery, which, however, her adroit management and delicacy of tact always enabled her to adapt to the party, so as to avoid giving offence. In the present instance she betook herself to this perilous mode of amusement, sometimes appealing to the blushing Rose, who only replied by a deprecating look.

“The fact is,” continued the unsuspicious aunt, “that Mr. Hunter is above his situation, and gives himself airs which is n’t by any means compatible with a wharf clerk. Mr. Jinks, his predecessor, a very decent young man, always wore fustian sleeves, and sometimes slipped on a canvass apron, when he had to weigh off casks of tallow, and tar, and oil, and such like; but this young spark would rather spoil a new coat, though Heaven knows he can little afford it, than bemean himself, as he calls it; and when Mr. B. told him t’other

day that he had more pride than prudence, he reddened like a turkey cock, and, drawing himself bolt upright, ‘Sir,’ says he, ‘a proper pride,’ says he, ‘is the only thing of which fortune has been unable to deprive me, and I value it accordingly,’ says he. Now, that’s what I call impertinence.”

“And that is what I call a becoming dignity,” thought Rose, whose dependent situation, coupled with the recollection of her former prospects, enabled her fully to sympathize with the party inculpated.

“And to speak in that swaggering way to my husband,” resumed the wife, “who is not only his employer, and indeed his master, if you come to that, but who could buy half the neighbourhood out and out, that is, if they were all to pay their debts. I scorn to boast of Mr. B.’s property, and indeed I need n’t, for his business and his buildings speak for themselves ; but, when a man’s money proves

him to be really respectable, it's very hard if he is n't treated *with* respect, *as* such, more especially by his own servants. Last Michaelmas he rose him his salary, which makes it the more ungrateful, but he thought of his poor mother and sister, and that's the only thing that makes him keep him on ; besides his doing it out of regard to me, and my making fresh promises that he shall conduct himself better in future."

"That is very kind of you, dear aunt, and I hope you will succeed in reconciling their present difference," said Helen, who felt not a little vexed at the thought of Hunter being dismissed, only to make way, in all probability, for a much less acceptable successor.

"Why, my dear," replied the aunt, "you know I am naturally good-tempered. Mr. B. used to say it was my only failing."

"I don't wonder at it : perhaps he had observed, for he is uncommonly quick in these

matters, that most people of good taste have a good temper, and upon this principle your kindness *might* be pushed to a fault. By the bye, I see you have got a new bonnet, and I never beheld a more elegant one; it is quite a darling, so simple, so neat, and so becoming, too. This sunflower and the crimson pæony make such a sweet contrast, and this love of a blue hollyhock running up between them! Look, Rose, did you ever see such a perfect *bijou*?"

The party thus appealed to scarcely knew which way to turn her eyes, for she expected every moment that the aunt would detect and resent the ridicule of this pretended admiration; she forced herself, however, to give a faint acquiescence, and Mrs. Bryant replied with a bridling complacency:—"Why, taste, you see, is a gift, and comes natural like. I was always remarkable for it, without taking any trouble to acquire it; and, as to this bonnet, I must say I think it particular genteel."

“I am sure uncle will be delighted with it. Suppose you step down and show it to him. I see him walking on the wharf; and then you can put in a word in favour of poor Mrs. Hunter’s son; and you look so handsome this morning, that it will be impossible for him to refuse you any thing.”

“La, child! it is too late in the day to talk of my being handsome,” said the pleased aunt, evidently disbelieving her own assertion. “I have made a sensation in my time, I must confess, as many can tell that used to go to the Hackney or Bow assemblies; but, we cannot always be young. Since you wish it, I will step down to Mr. B.; and in the meanwhile you girls can be putting on your things, for I want you to walk out with me, that I may introduce you to some of our neighbours.”

“Really, Helen,” cried Rose, as soon as they were alone, “you must check this propensity

to broad and barefaced raillery, or it will get you some day into a sad scrape."

"Broad and barefaced was it? then it was appropriate, for it was like the object to whom it was addressed. Besides, the end sanctifies the means. What would have become of poor Mrs. Hunter and her daughter, if her son had been dismissed from an employment which constitutes their sole support? To propitiate my aunt, and secure her interference, I was obliged to play upon her foibles, and who would not have done the same in the cause of humanity, to say nothing of the amusement to ourselves?"

"Nay, I approve of your object, and do justice to your motives. I was only fearful of her discovering your mockery. I am glad you prevailed upon her to interfere, for it would be shocking that poor Mrs. Hunter and her daughter should be exposed to want."

"That was my feeling, and I am glad to find

that you share it. Come, let us put on our bonnets, first taking out the flowers, for aunt has enough for the whole party. What a mercy it is that she did not add a cauliflower to her bouquet !”

When ladies declare, as in the present instance, that they will be ready in five minutes, having nothing in the world to do but to put on their bonnets, the minimum of the aforesaid five minutes may be safely taken at half an hour ; the maximum we have not yet ascertained. Mrs. Bryant, whose head-gear was already adjusted, was not sorry, however, to have a little unoccupied time, as it afforded her an opportunity of taking a seat in the balcony, where she loved to display herself, whenever she was arrayed in any new or expensive article of dress. Parties rowing up or down the river, and passing occasionally close under the balcony, had sometimes dropped complimentary observations upon her handsome looks, for the

chance of which reward she would prolong her sitting with all the exemplary patience of an angler, waiting a whole morning for a nibble.

Latterly, these aquatic offerings of personal admiration had been transferred to the smart new bonnet, or the showy pelisse, not always unaccompanied by remarks, in which she had more than once caught the objectionable word "vulgar;" but, as she attributed all such inapplicable terms to ignorance and want of taste, she retained her seat, in the hope of eliciting a more acceptable homage from more discerning passengers. As her present bonnet was equally well calculated to catch the eye, and suit the taste of nautical critics, it had received its due meed of praise from two boat companies, in the course of half an hour, a success which rendered her insensible to the lapse of time, and restored her to her young friends, when she was summoned to join them, in a mood of more than ordinary graciousness.

“We shall have to pass through Tooley Street,” said Mrs. Bryant, “so, suppose we just drop in for a few minutes on poor Mrs. Hunter, who lodges at the dyer’s. They call it Chamelion House on that account. Isn’t it a tasty idea? She will take it kind of us, and particularly in *your* going, Helen, for folks that are a little down in the world are always flattered by any attentions from the rich. It is n’t every day that people in lodgings can get a visit from an heiress.”

“Pray oblige me, aunt, by dropping that ridiculous appellation, which is not only particularly objectionable to me, and little merited by my moderate independence, but may, perhaps, expose the Helen of Eagle Wharf to be run away with by some Hector of Horsley-down.”

“I never heard of any Hectors at Horsley-down, and yet we know most of the respectable families. However, we were talking of poor

Mrs. Hunter, and I am glad I thought of calling on her, for she is really a very good sort of a woman, and, as I told you, was once in better circumstances, which accounts for her being a sort of connexion of mine. She is a kind-hearted, simple-minded body, and would really be a pleasant companion enough, if she did not always appear to be thinking of some household trifles in the midst of every conversation, however serious. She will be glad to learn, poor thing ! that all differences between her son and Mr. B. are once more made up, for she knows that they are all completely dependent on my husband, as I have indeed more than once reminded the young man of, though I always did it with delicacy, for, though one does happen to be superior to others in point of fortune, I don't think it by any means particular genteel to boast of it."

"From that proposition few will dissent," said Helen ; "I have always considered purse-

pride the most contemptible of any : and have, therefore, an additional reason for hoping that you will never again call me the heiress, especially before strangers."

"Now that's what I call ridiculous enough ; you're not ashamed of your money, are you ? I'm sure it was all honestly come by, and, though I don't say that you have so pretty a fortune as some, still you are an heiress, and such I shall call you, though I hate purse-pride as much as you do. But, here we are at poor Mrs. Hunter's lodgings, and I declare I am glad on 't, for I have talked myself fairly out of breath, and wheeze like an old post-horse. I hope her daughter won't be at home, for she looks so melancholy always, that it gives one the mopes. Her brother's had enough when he is in one of his solemn and silent fits, but the sister's worse, and then the apartments are *so* small, and *so* smoky, and *so* poky !"

Although the last remark was not altogether

without foundation, there was an air of perfect neatness, and indeed an occasional approach to elegance, about the parlour, that astonished both Helen and Rose. Mrs. Hunter, an amiable-looking person, whose prematurely grizzled hair was confined in braids by a close cap that seemed to have just left the starcher's hand, and whose whole attire exhibited a quaker-like neatness, received her visitants with a well-bred ease, and introduced to Helen and Rose her daughter Harriet, whose dejected appearance, in spite of the faint smile with which she greeted them, justified Mrs. Bryant's description.

The poor girl had experienced a disappointment in her affections, which might well account for this habitual pensiveness. The object of her attachment, who had no fault but his poverty, was to have purchased a partnership with her small marriage portion ; but, when the brother's unfortunate speculations incapa-

citated Mrs. Hunter from fulfilling this arrangement, the relations and friends of the lover would not consent to his marriage until he had a better prospect of maintaining a wife ; and thus poor Harriet, who maintained a regular correspondence with her affianced, had only to pray for more prosperous days, of which she saw no expectation, and pined away under the withering effect of that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick.

Not a single word of reproach, however, ever escaped the lips either of the mother or daughter, both of whom, in the presence of Alfred, endeavoured to command their very looks, and to assume a cheerfulness that was foreign to their heart, lest they should increase the melancholy by which he was oppressed.

Perhaps their generous and considerate forbearance would have answered its purpose more effectually, had it been less invariable, for Alfred often whispered to himself : — “ Oh ! if they

would but accuse me now and then ! if they would but remind me of my foolish prodigality, and upbraid me as the author of their reverses, I could endure it without flinching ; but, this suffering without complaint, this affectionate magnanimity, this heroism of resignation, cuts more deeply into my heart than would the sharpest censures of my conduct.”

After Mrs. Bryant had introduced her companions by name, adding in a whisper that her niece was an heiress, who had come to live with them, and the other a poor friend entirely dependent upon her, she continued in a tone of condescension, which had the effect of impertinence without meaning it. “ Well, to be sure, Mrs. Hunter, how tidy and comfortable every thing looks, and so it always does when I come here. I declare I don’t see but what people in ever so small lodgings, even over a shop, and without hardly a guinea in their pockets, *may* make themselves as happy, if

they do but manage a bit, as others that are rolling in thousands. I can answer for it, and so can Mr. B. for that matter, that the rich are not always free from care. Heigho !”

“ We should be most ungrateful creatures not to be contented,” was the reply ; “ when we are surrounded with so many blessings. I am very happy, thank Heaven, in my children : never was a more attached family than our’s. The Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb ; and, besides——dear ! there’s the kitchen-jack creaking again, and I have spoken twice to Mrs. Tibbs about oiling it.”

“ What a cheerful situation you have selected !” said Helen, hardly able to suppress a titter at this inopportune remark.

“ That proceeds from its being a corner house, and having a window in each street, by which means we command the burial-ground in one direction, and can see all the way to the workhouse in the other. Then we are *so* for-

tunate not to have any disagreeables or nuisances ; for, though it's a dyer's, we seldom have any *very* bad smells, and we are never annoyed by the soap-boilers at No. 10, except when the wind's in the west ; and, as to the noise of the linseed-mills, I have got so used to it, that I scarcely hear it. We have much to be thankful for, and I hope we both feel ——. La ! here's my thimble after all in the nutmeg-grater ! What a hunt I have had for it, to be sure !”

“ How soon one may get reconciled to things,” said Mrs. Bryant ; “ but, after all, people *must* cut their coat according to their cloth.”

“ Very true,” resumed Mrs. Hunter ; “ and exposed as we all are to the vicissitudes of life, we cannot be too grateful, however small may be the portion of cloth that is left to us. Well-a-day ! we live in a strange world, but we must all look forward to ——, Harriet ! do n't

you hear the cry? Run and tell Sarah to buy a pennyworth of cat's-meat for dear Tabby."

Blushing at her mother's indecorous peroration, Harriet hastened to obey the mandate; Rose, afraid to look her friend in the face, lest she should be provoked to sympathetic laughter, kept her eyes fixed upon the floor; and Helen, who always found it difficult to conceal her sense of the ludicrous, started from her chair, and began to examine one of the framed drawings with great apparent attention, an act which only drew upon her the notice that she meant to elude.

"That is painted by my dear Alfred," said the proud mother; "is it not beautiful? He was considered an excellent amateur artist before our circumstances altered; but he has no time, now, poor fellow, for any such amusements."

Helen summoned Rose to look at the drawing, which was really a superior performance,

when both expressed their admiration in such warm terms that Mrs. Bryant joined them, and, after peering at it for a moment, exclaimed :—" A very pretty landscape, I do declare, but I always regret when I see a painted windmill, that they can't make the sails go round, it would look so much more natural, like, would n't it, now ? I had no idea Mr. Hunter could draw so well, for he do n't write a particular good hand."

" Perhaps you are not aware," added the mother, " that he sings very prettily. He has had little or no instruction, but he is allowed to have a very good bass voice."

" Well, now, that 's rather odd, is n't it, for he do n't speak particular gruff."

" I am very glad we have discovered this accomplishment," said Helen ; " I have just ordered a piano, and, as my friend, Miss Mayhew, is an excellent vocalist, we shall, perhaps, prevail on Mr. Hunter to accompany her."

Harriet now re-entered the room, and, feeling the necessity of making some apology for her mother's ill-timed allusion to the cat's-meat, she said with a smile : — “ My dear mamma, who is kind to every thing, is very fond of animals, and takes a delight in feeding them. You may see by the sleek appearance of her favourite Tabby, as well as of the fat pug-dog, that she does her best to kill them with kindness ; and how my brother and myself have so long escaped that fate, is a mystery that I cannot solve. Even her plants and flowers she waters till they become dropsical and die.”

“ I am fond of animals, I confess,” said Mrs. Hunter ; “ but, as to killing you and dear Alfred with kindness, I scarcely know what you mean. I should be a wretch, indeed, if I did not strive to make some little return for all your dutiful and affectionate attentions to me. And what *can* I do for you, after all ? O Mrs. Bryant ! O Miss Owen, O Miss — — pshaw ! I

shall forget my own name next—if you did but know how good these dear children are to me ; how they are perpetually thinking of me ; how they watch night and day ; how they study ; how they—my heart's so full that I can hardly—and indeed what could *I* do to reward them ? but I pray to Heaven every night that ——.”

The fond mother, whose voice had been gradually breaking, strove in vain to complete the sentence ; her nostrils dilated, her eyes glistened, and she would, doubtless, have melted into tears, but that, as her looks fell upon the window, a sudden turn was given to her rambling thoughts, and, after a moment's delay, she exclaimed in her usual tone :—“ What a fine donkey ! and what a shame for that boy to beat it so !”

By tapping at the window, holding up her finger, and shaking her head at the offender, she procured a momentary cessation of his blows, when she resumed, “ I cannot bear to

see those patient animals abused ; it quite goes to my heart, and I almost wish at times that my own shoulders could receive the stripes bestowed upon those of the poor beasts. I hope I did not frighten the little boy, though, by my angry looks."

"Have no apprehensions upon that score," said the daughter, "for your face is naturally so benevolent, that it cannot be made to assume a forbidding expression, even when you wish it."

"Come, we must be trotting," said Mrs. Bryant, "for the chimney has begun to smoke, and, if I stay, I shall have one of my coughing fits."

"Why, it does make people cough ; it serves dear Alfred so," replied the mother, "and I generally keep lozenges by me on that account ; but, all corner houses smoke more or less, and one cannot have every thing."

"In defence of our poor chimney," smiled

Harriet, "I must say that it seldom smokes, except when we have visitants. Never did I so much regret its rudeness as at the present moment, since you might, perhaps, have prolonged your stay had it been upon its good behaviour."

Helen and Rose, to whom these words were addressed, declared that they should be delighted to renew their visit at an early period, expressing a hope at the same time that Miss Hunter would frequently favour them with a call at Eagle Wharf. "My dearest Rose de Meaux!" cried the former, when they were once more in the street, "methinks you and I—give me credit for the humility of the comparison—bear a close resemblance to the far-famed butcher, who instituted such a diligent search for the very knife which he held in his mouth, since we have been searching the neighbourhood for pleasant society, without being aware that we had a Phoenix, a nonsuch, an

Admirable Crichton, under the same roof with us."

"To whom do you allude?"

"To whom *should* I allude but to the preternatural wielder of the quill, who seems to possess accomplishments enough to furnish forth a hero in disguise; though we have hitherto lacked discernment to discover them. His painting was really beautiful, and would have been still more so, as my aunt very truly observed, had the sails of the windmill been made to turn round, don't you think so, Rose? But, as to the singing and the poetry, for his mother told me he was a versifier, I confess myself a little sceptical, until I have more impartial authority."

"Very right, child!" said Mrs. Bryant, "you must not believe all you hear, no, nor half, either. What can be more ridiculous, for instance, than to hear them talk of Alfred's good-nature, when at Eagle Wharf he

is either irritable and proud, or silent and sullen."

"He may be good-natured without being good-tempered," whispered Helen to Rose; "though I can fancy him to be both when he is at home, in his own element, and neither when he breathes the uncongenial atmosphere of the Wharf; uncongenial, I mean, when *we* are not there."

"It must be so," replied her friend: "how delightful is it to contemplate a family in which there reigns such a perfect harmony of taste and feeling! Even about the old lady, in spite of her awkward *contretemps*, and her sudden episodes *àpropos* to nothing, there is a certain air which raises her above her sphere, and compels you to respect even while you smile at her. Did you ever observe what a moral dignity, quite independent of station, is imparted by the affections and the virtues? Nay, I have sometimes thought that their possessors gene-

rally display a purer taste, and a greater degree of elegance, than the finest intellects less gifted with amiability.”

“Vastly true, Miss Mayhew!” cried Mrs. Bryant. “You mean that when people are particular genteel, they have always a particular good taste. You have made this observation, I dare say, since you came to the Wharf. La! you will make me quite vain, if you go on in this way.”

Forgetting, in her inordinate love of banter and raillery, the respect due to her aunt, Helen took up the cue thus offered, and drew out her foibles so broadly and so successfully, that Rose seized an opportunity to turn the conversation, by inquiring to whom their next visit was to be paid.

“I don’t consider our call at the Hunters’ as a regular visit,” said Mrs. Bryant; “for they can’t afford to see company and give dinners, and I dare say you don’t want any tea

and turn-out acquaintance. Mr. B. can't bear it: he wouldn't give a farthing for an acquaintance without a good spread, and prime old port, and the best of every thing. He gives it himself, you see, and, therefore, he has a right to look for it in others. Makeshifts and substitutes he can't abide; he calls it swindling. We are going now to the Lomaxes at Cypress House, the family you have heard so much about, and who, as I am informed, give capital dinners of three courses, with real champagne and plate in the handsomest style imaginable. There *are* inuendoes circulating against them, but they deserve no attention, for, people living in this way, and keeping carriages and horses, cannot be otherwise than perfectly respectable; and all the insinuations, I find, come from those that cannot get invited to partake of their good cheer."

"Let me congratulate you, my sweet little Rose de Meaux," cried Helen, as they returned from their visit to Cypress House. "You seem

to have been quite smitten with the youthful Benjamin ; and the heir of the Lomax property, if I may judge by his impassioned demeanour, was not less suddenly captivated by the charms and talents of his visitant. Well, you will make a most interesting couple, for you are half a fairy, he is half a seraph, and both of you are Quixotic enthusiasts, though you tilt at different objects. Remember, however, that I bar your marriage, unless I am to be received as an inmate in your family. I must not and will not lose you."

"The serious, I might almost say the devout, nature of his conversation," replied Rose, "would afford but little ground for your railery. Willingly, however, do I confess that there is something unspeakably touching and interesting in his appearance and discourse : his looks and language are equally spiritual, and I feel as if I had been conversing with an inhabitant of another sphere."

“ I ought not to laugh at you,” said Helen ;
“ for I, too, little subject as I am to any enthusiastic surprises, have been fascinated by his sister, more than I can well express to you. Placid without being inanimate, sedate and yet not grave, Mary Lomax seems to unite high principles and great strength of character with an affectionate heart and varied powers of amusement. In short, I am delighted with her, and felt more than once tempted to exclaim, in the language of the mock German play, ‘ A sudden thought strikes me ; let us swear an eternal friendship.’ ”

“ Who is enthusiastic, now, Helen ? ”

“ I plead guilty ; I have been as much smitten as yourself : I have fallen in love at first sight.”

“ To that charge I do *not* plead guilty.”

“ Well, then, the young gentleman has fallen in love with you.”

“ I could almost stake my existence that not

a thought of the kind has ever agitated his pure and innocent bosom, except that general love which embraces all mankind. He is but a boy in years, and, besides, his heart is in heaven."

"Waiting till you summon it back, hey? At all events, my dear Mimosa, our prospects brighten most unexpectedly, and Eagle Wharf, to assume my uncle's language, has risen ten per cent. in my estimation since the morning."

CHAPTER XI.

“ You plead each other’s cause. What witness have you ?
Ourselves and Heaven.
Guilt witnesses for guilt ! Hence love and friendship !
You have no longer place in human breasts.”

ALL FOR LOVE.

It had been agreed between Mr. and Mrs. Lomax that, to avoid all unnecessary peril, they should converse as little as possible upon the subject of the fabricated will ; but it was found much easier to make this stipulation than to observe it. That which was ever uppermost in their waking thoughts, and not seldom presented to them in the appalling visions of the night, it was impossible to banish altogether from their lips, at least from those of the hus-

band ; for the wife had sufficient resolution of mind to compel herself to a strict and vigilant silence.

As the former, when denied the natural vent for his fears and anxieties, suffered them to escape in audible soliloquies, which it was so much the more difficult to repress, because he was unconscious of their utterance ; the partner of his guilt, alarmed at the dangers into which this infirmity might betray them, thought it better to withdraw her interdict, and to allow him to talk with her occasionally upon the forbidden topic, a privilege of which he availed himself with an importunity and abject fear that sometimes moved her spleen, and seldom failed to excite her contempt. Natural and pertinent apprehensions she would have excused ; rational inquiry as to the fittest and most prudent mode of conduct should the will be challenged, she would have gladly encouraged ; but his teasing and inept suggestions,

his fantastical panics, and general imbecility of mind and purpose, which became every day more conspicuous, fretted her temper, and added to the depression of her spirits.

If the newspapers contained any intelligence from South America, he would shake like an aspen leaf, and express a hundred vague and foolish misgivings as to the return of Edward Ruddock : every vessel that he saw passing up the river was converted by his guilty conscience into an arrival from that quarter, bringing the rightful heir, to expose and punish the usurper of his inheritance : and every letter, of which he did not recognize the writing in the address, was opened with trembling hands, lest it should come from the same dreaded individual, or from some law-agent, announcing his intention to dispute the validity of the will.

But the terrors and visions of the day were as nothing compared to the phantasmagoria of his sleeping hours, when the nightmare be-

striding his labouring breast, and sometimes assuming the appearance of the hangman, conjured up all the horrors and the paraphernalia of a public execution, and made him so distinctly feel the halter around his throat, and all the agonies of strangulation, that the wretched man, writhing his convulsed limbs, finally emitted a struggling yell which it was terrible to hear.

Instead of commiseration for his sufferings, he encountered nothing but fierce reproaches from his wife, who told him that the phantasms by which he was haunted were the results of his own pusillanimity, and of the imaginary scarecrows upon which he suffered his mind to dwell during the day. “*I* have none of these craven fears in the morning,” would she sometimes exclaim; “and, consequently, *I* have none of these ghastly dreams by night. Had *I* such a coward heart as your’s, *I* would tear it from my bosom, and stamp it into clay, rather

than be the slave of its dastard fictions. Expose me not to catch the infection of your terror ; to live in constant dread is to realize, nay, to exceed, its worst apprehensions : death is a thousand times preferable to such a miserable and contemptible existence."

" Ah, Jane, Jane !" would the unhappy man reply ; " if this be true, as to my cost I know it to be, surely I deserve your compassion, rather than upbraidings and revilings. You are the last that should taunt me with my wretchedness. Who entailed it upon me ? Who tempted me to commit the crime which —— ?"

" She who lifted you out of the mire of poverty and contempt," interposed the wife, with a disdainful look. " She who redeemed you from a worse than Egyptian bondage and dependence, and made you a gentleman, in station, at least, if not in soul : she who surrounded you with the respect and homage that

are ever shown to wealth ; she who enabled you to wallow in those sensual indulgences from which alone your grovelling spirit can derive a pleasure."

" Oh ! how gladly would I resign them all ! Oh ! how cheerfully would I again become a copying-clerk, steeped to the very throat in penury and insignificance, if so I might be free from guilt !"

" Free from the fear of punishment, you mean ; for, if you abhorred the guilt, you would not revel in its rewards with such a sottish abandonment. Joel Lomax ! Nature made you a poor, mean-spirited creature, and your character is not to be altered by circumstances : it is beyond the reach of redemption."

Seldom a week passed without some alteration of this nature, generally consisting of mutual reproaches and recriminations, and sometimes terminating in menaces, which kept both parties in a state of perpetual irritation

and terror. The arch-enemy of mankind, who,

“wiser than before,
Now tempts by making rich, not making poor,”

had, indeed, succeeded in destroying the happiness as well as the innocence of this ill-fated, though seemingly prosperous, couple. In all their former trials, which had been neither few nor light, they had derived consolation and support from an unaccusing conscience, as well as from their mutual accord and affection. Yielding a willing submission to the stronger mind of his wife, the husband had found in her talents and energy not only a source of pride, but a stimulus of attachment; while his spouse, whose disposition was somewhat imperious, became reconciled to the comparative imbecility of her partner, in consideration of the undisputed ascendancy which it enabled her to exercise.

As there are discords in music which con-

tribute to harmony, and chemical substances which ultimately undergo a more perfect fusion from their primary indisposition to unite together, so may conjugal attachment be sometimes cemented by qualities which at the first view might seem to threaten its disruption. Weakness leans upon strength, timidity flies for refuge to courage, the protectors and the protected naturally love each other, the former from a feeling of gratified pride, the latter from a sense of obligation; and, though in the case of Lomax and his wife, the usual order had been reversed, and she who belonged to what we denominate the weaker sex had obtained easy dominion over the mind of her husband, the result had confirmed our theory, for they had hitherto passed through life with few domestic jars and no serious difference.

Now, however, the case was altered. There can be no real friendship where there is no mutual respect. From the time of her mar-

riage up to the fatal moment when she conceived the project of forging the will, the conduct of Mrs. Lomax had been so free from reproach, that her husband had revered her principles, not less than he admired her general powers of mind. But this foundation of his regard and esteem she herself had for ever cut away, and he began to look upon her first with indifference, and then with a concealed aversion, as the insidious tempter, whose mingled menaces and blandishments had placed both his body and soul in the most perilous predicament, and had entailed upon him all those terrors and miseries by which he was incessantly beleaguered.

Nor could he retain his habitual deference even for her intellectual superiority, when he had lost the sense of her moral worth, and perceived that in perpetrating a crime she had committed a grievous and irretrievable mistake. Not only did he now presume to argue with

her, but he would retort her sarcasms, and even affect at times to retaliate her cold and bitter contempt. The agitation she had occasionally exhibited when his unconscious soliloquies threatened a disclosure of their secret had revealed to him the important fact that their participation in guilt had made them thenceforward equals; he felt that the being whom he had hitherto been contented to obey was now in his power; and, with the arrogance natural to an abject spirit when circumstances have given it a casual command, he became at times as prone to domineer as he had previously been cowering and subservient.

Lomax's attempts of this nature, however, met with nothing but signal discomfiture. She might be annoyed and irritated, but not even the humiliating conviction that her life was in the power of her husband could daunt the indomitable soul of Mrs. Lomax, though she almost detested existence when she reflected

every gesture may be traced a consciousness of his new importance ; he carries himself erect, plants his foot upon the ground with a firm step, and looks down upon those to whom he formerly looked up, either with an impertinent air of condescension, or with that arrogant assumption, which nothing but the pride of purse can engender, and none but an ignoble spirit can display. In his sanguine moods, for even the timid Lomax was occasionally confident and overweening, he would exhibit both these varieties of deportment ; but a single marked or scrutinizing glance from a passenger, an unexpected allusion to arrivals from South America, and, above all, the approach of any tall thin man in a low-crowned hat, for with this spectre his mind was ever haunted, would instantly humble his pride, and fill him with terrors, which as quickly manifested themselves in his averted and downcast eyes, his crouching shoulders, as if he would shrink within him-

self, and the accelerated step with which he skulked away from the object of his alarm.

Among the eccentric habits generated by the morbid state of his mind, it was his frequent custom, whatever might be the weather, to take a boat in the afternoon, disembark in Thames Street, and walk to the Bank, which he would perambulate round and round, for one or two hours, muttering to himself the amount of the different stocks that stood in his name. It was a solace to his feelings thus to find himself, as it were, in the immediate presence of his wealth, to know that he might instantly sell or convert his funds, and flee, at a moment's warning, to the extremity of the earth, should any sudden emergency necessitate such a step. In the triumph of this fancied security, he would congratulate himself that, if his wealth had brought with it anxiety and self-reproach, it at least supplied him with wings which would presently speed him beyond the reach of a pursuer, and

that she held it at the will of one whom she now began to hate as much as she had ever despised him, and whose new-born insolence of manner she sometimes checked with overwhelming ridicule, and sometimes with the most withering contempt. It was a consolation to know that he could not well endanger her safety without compromising his own ; she reflected, moreover, that he was in her power as much as she was in his ; but the moody and desperate courses thus suggested to her were restrained by the recollection that neither party could injure the other without drawing down disgrace and misery, aggravated perhaps by all the evils of poverty, upon her darling Benjamin.

Upon Lomax himself, who was equally attached to both his children, while he trembled at the thought of exposure, and the loss of the luxuries to which he was devoted, this consideration operated with an influence so potent,

that, after the most furious dissensions, it generally prompted him to seek a reconciliation, in which the wife, from a similar motive, usually condescended to meet him half way. Thus was their life a painful alternation of warfare and hollow truces, embittered by their growing dislike and contempt; by their mutual fear of treachery and betrayal; by the dread of prosecution and detection on the part of their common enemy, the rightful heir; and by the necessity of concealing, with the most jealous vigilance, their manifold squabbles and annoyances, not only from the world at large, but from their own children and the servants, whose eyes were constantly upon them.

Of this anxious and heart-corroding existence the effects soon began to manifest themselves in the appearance and deportment of Lomax. In general, a suddenly enriched man, especially if he be of a vulgar soul, may be instantly recognized by his looks and his demeanour. In

ensure him, beneath a foreign sky, a continuance of his present gratifications. Even the chink of the guineas, as his fingers nervously twitched them up and down in his pocket, and the rattling of the large seals appended to his watch-chain, fell gratefully upon his ear, for they wafted to it a golden sound, and he eagerly welcomed the most trifling circumstance that reminded him of his altered fortunes, and gave him an additional assurance of his opulence.

For the same reason, the deferential air of the brokers, with some of whom he had made acquaintance, and who were all eager to court the favour of a large stockholder, filled him with a singular complacency, which was legible in his more composed countenance and gait, until some inexplicable change of mood, prompted by the vagaries of a diseased mind, occasioned him to start from his round, with hurried steps and an evident perturbation of spirit.

As even an unknown individual of singular

appearance, regularly frequenting any peculiar locality in so populous a city as London, soon wears himself a place in the public memory, it is not improbable that many of the citizens now existing may recall the gaunt and slouching figure of Lomax, as he prowled along Bartholomew Lane and Lothbury, chinking the gold in his pocket, and mumbling to himself; the sides of his large looped hat sometimes filled with the pouring rain, while he carried an unfurled umbrella under his arm, and his circumambulations continued with a sort of unconscious doggedness, until some occurrence woke him from his reverie, when he would plunge into the crowd of Cornhill or the Poultry, and disappear.

Time, the great equaliser, which is constantly employed in converting joy into satiety, and sorrow into resignation, is not without its occasional effect in calming the terrors of the guilty, so far as the responsibilities of this world are concerned. Continued impunity na-

turally inspires confidence, and even the timid mind that has long been familiar with danger at last learns to regard it with comparative indifference. Of this Lomax afforded an example, unless when any special alarm by day, or the uncheckable phantasms of sleep, gave new excitement to his fears. Having taken it for granted that Dr. H—— of Bristol would write to Edward Ruddock on the death of Hoffman, he had calculated the time when an answer might be expected from South America, or when the rightful heir might himself arrive to contest the will, and institute proceedings for the recovery of his property, and the punishment of its usurper.

Several months had now elapsed beyond the period of this anticipated contingency; there had been more than sufficient time for a second or a third communication, and yet no challenger appeared, nor was he served with any legal process or notice that intimated an in-

tention of disputing the validity of the will. Encouraged by this silence, his hopes gradually predominated over his fears, and periods intervened, during which his mind recovered a portion of its lost serenity. His wife, who gladly remarked the change, sought to confirm it by communicating to him some of her own confidence and fortitude, an object in which she could only partially succeed.

So far, however, was her purpose attained, that, during three or four months, he ceased to worry her either by his unconscious soliloquies, or his pusillanimous reproaches; she forbore, in consequence, to recriminate or upbraid; and both found such an incalculable addition to their comfort from this temporary restraint, that they made a mutual compact for its continuance, flattering themselves that their differences as well as their dangers were over, and that they should thenceforward be enabled to enjoy their good fortune, without any recur-

rence of their recent bickerings and miseries.

Alas! there may be a respite, but, without repentance and atonement, there is no redemption from the consequences of crime: there may be a truce, but there is no permanent cordiality, between its accomplices. An occurrence which could not have been anticipated, and against the effects of which it was impossible to guard, because it suspended over his head an indefinite and invisible danger, restored with tenfold force all the terrors of Lomax, shattered his mind into a pitiable state of agony, revived his bitter reproaches of his wife, irritated her beyond endurance, and converted their temporary reconciliation into an exacerbated hostility.

Some difference of opinion having arisen as to the precise wording of the will, which was still ever uppermost in their thoughts and conversation, it was proposed to refer to it; when it appeared that Lomax, on depositing the

original in Doctors' Commons, had omitted to retain a copy. For this oversight his wife gently rebuked him, pointing out the importance of always keeping a duplicate in the house for the sake of reference; and the husband, who was nervously sensitive upon this subject, ordered his carriage to be ready at an early hour of the following morning, that he might repair his error.

Hardly had the clerks taken their respective stations at the Will Office, and commenced the labours of the day by lounging over the newspapers, when the impatient Lomax, who had provided himself with pen and paper for the purpose, proceeded to the proper division, paid the customary fee, and requested permission to see the will of Diedrich Hoffman, mentioning the date of his death.

"Of Diedrich Hoffman?" said the clerk; "why, I took down that will only yesterday for a gentleman who wanted to copy it. I re-

member it because it was such a queer name he asked for."

"Hey, how, what!" exclaimed Lomax, with breathless agitation. "Yesterday! a gentleman? — copy? What — what — what sort of a person was he? Do you know—know him?"

"Not I; we never ask people's names, but I recollect his figure perfectly: he was a tall thin man, in a low-crowned hat."

"Lord have mercy upon me!" ejaculated Lomax in a hollow voice, as he clung for support to the desk, and then sunk into a chair.

"What is the matter?" demanded the surprised clerk; "are you not well, sir?"

No answer was returned for a minute or two; but the conscience-stricken criminal, aware that his perturbation might excite suspicion, made at length an effort to recover himself, and stammered out:—"I have been a great invalid—the heat over—over—overcame me; I shall be better presently."

“ You had better sit quiet for a little while,” replied the clerk, “ and the cool air of the office will presently revive you. This is the will, sir—Diedrich Hoffman of Bristol—queer name—a foreigner, I suppose.”

So saying, he resumed his perusal of the newspaper, and Lomax, left to himself, endeavoured to rally his prostrate faculties.

Vain was the attempt. His senses were bewildered ; every thing swam before his dizzy eyes ; not a single word of the writing could he decipher ; a confusion of hollow sounds rang in his ears, and his agitated hand occasioned such a rustling of the paper, which he almost unconsciously grasped, that it must have excited the attention of the clerk, had not his thoughts been preoccupied by the perusal of the news.

In vain did he argue with himself that there might be no real ground for his apprehensions, and that to betray his alarm might realize the

danger which at present was only conjectural. His functions refused their office ; and, after several unavailing attempts to peruse the document, he assumed a forced composure, returned it to the clerk, and with tottering knees walked slowly out of the room, stealing terrified glances on either side, in the fear that every individual whom he passed might rush from his seat to seize and detain him.

Feeling, as he crossed the threshold of the door, as if he had escaped from some great and imminent danger, he breathed more freely ; the pulsations of his heart were less painfully vehement ; the air, which blew freshly, helped to revive him ; and he leaped into his carriage with the alacrity of a flying felon who has reached a sanctuary, still, however, hastily drawing up the glasses, and shrinking into a corner, in his anxiety to avoid observation.

As the vehicle was driven rapidly away, his terrors gradually diminished, and he was even

beginning to reproach himself for his cowardice, when the carriage suddenly stopped, and he heard the voice of his coachman in altercation with strangers in the street.

“I am discovered—I am arrested — God be merciful to me !” again muttered the wretched Lomax, shutting his eyes that he might not see the danger, and snatching up his feet in an agony of terror.

The door, however, was not opened; and, as the voices of the disputants became louder, he was at length enabled to ascertain, with an unspeakable relief of mind, that they were merely quarrelling about a stoppage in the street, a dispute which ended by his coachman turning the carriage round, that he might make his way into Ludgate Hill through Bridge Street.

In the complacency of returning self-possession, the still trembling Lomax, who could not help reproaching himself with the ridiculous alarm which had almost seared his senses, re-

solved that his future cheer of mind should not be disturbed by such ridiculous apprehensions.

Doubtless there was something appalling in the intelligence he had gathered at Doctors' Commons ; and he was fully persuaded that the figure he had seen peering through the kitchen-window, when he committed the original will to the flames, was the same mysterious individual who had procured, only on the previous day, a copy of the forged document. This was a startling conviction. The man, whoever he might be, was living, and in London : he might be walking beside the carriage at that very moment, a fact of which the bare possibility suddenly chasing away his newly-born courage, made him huddle himself still more closely in the corner.

But, on the other hand, he reflected that he could only have required a copy of the will for the purpose of instituting legal proceedings, a

tedious process, of which the previous notice that must be given would allow him abundant time to sell out his funds, and to embark with his family on board some American or other neutral vessel, for a foreign land, where he should be beyond the reach of danger.

It was possible, moreover, that a copy of the document might have been taken without any hostile intention, or, that if such were even entertained, it might be abandoned from an inability to obtain proof in invalidation of the registered and authenticated deed. Who could challenge it? What eyes but his own and his wife's beheld its forgery? Was it not duly signed in the presence of several living witnesses, whose signatures avouched its genuineness? To these interrogatories his returning confidence gave such satisfactory replies, that he drew himself up with a defying toss of the head, and ejaculated a contemptuous "Ha! ha!" in scorn of his own pusillanimous misgivings.

The carriage, which for some time had been proceeding at a very slow rate, now stopped ; and Lomax, whose ear was exceedingly sensitive, caught the buzz and murmur of numerous voices, implying the presence of some unusual crowd. Dastardly as he was, his recent cogitations had invigorated him with so much momentary fortitude, that he raised the blind and lowered the window, in order to ascertain the cause of the stoppage, and of the many-tongued sounds that filled the air, when a scene was suddenly presented to his eyes, of which his bewildered apprehensions could not for a moment determine the precise nature.

Before him extended a street of considerable length and width, entirely filled with a dense and stationary mass of people, while others crowded the windows, balconies, and even some of the house-tops, all gazing intently towards the further extremity, where, in front of

a massive and stern-looking edifice of stone, a figure wearing the semblance of a well-dressed man, save that a cotton cap enveloped the head, swung by a rope from a wooden framework.

A moment's recollection convinced him that he was gazing up the Old Bailey upon some guilty wretch suffering the last sentence of the law, in front of Newgate. A scene somewhat similar to that now actually presented to him had been so often conjured up in his dreams, wherein he himself figured as the hangman's victim, that he had no sooner recognized the nature of the exhibition than his blood ran cold, a sickness came over him, and he recoiled from its contemplation with an involuntary shudder, impatiently awaiting the moment when the advance of the carriage should withdraw him from a spectacle fraught with such appalling associations.

No progress, however, was made ; and at this

juncture two men, standing close by the open window of the vehicle, recognized and saluted each other, when one of them inquired:—
“What is the offence for which this unhappy man is suffering, that his execution draws together such an unusual assemblage of people?”

“He is, or rather was, a gentleman by birth and station,” replied the party thus addressed, “which may in some degree explain the extraordinary interest excited by his fate; and he is hung for forging a will, by which he obtained, and enjoyed for several years, a considerable property.”

“Such rascals deserve the gallows,” resumed the first speaker, “for they may be said to rob and defraud the dead, as well as the living. I doubt whether you are quite correct, though, in saying that he *enjoyed* his plunder during several years, for there cannot, I suspect, be much enjoyment of any thing when a man

knows that he has always got a halter around his neck."

"Right, right! and a halter, too, which, sooner or later, is sure to throttle him, for this sort of villany seldom escapes ultimate discovery, and it is one that is never pardoned."

Of Lomax's feelings, during this brief but harrowing conversation, language is inadequate to give a description. Afraid to move his arm and draw down the blind or raise the window, lest he should excite observation, he remained nailed to the corner of the carriage, compelled to listen to further comments of the same nature, every word of which pierced his ear like the blade of a sharp knife, and tortured him with the most excruciating mental anguish.

A clamour of voices and a confusion among the mob, arising from the seizure of a pick-pocket, occasioned him once more to look out

upon the scene, when his starting eyes encountered an object which made his whole frame thrill with an aggravated horror. Exalted upon the steps of the corner house opposite, and transfixing him with a stern and piercing stare, he beheld a tall thin man in a low-crowned hat—the man—the identical figure, which had disappeared so mysteriously from the kitchen area—the same, doubtless, who had so recently procured a copy of the will, and was now, perchance, marking the victim who might shortly collect another crowd upon the same spot, by dangling from a gibbet like the malefactor upon whom they were now gazing.

The stranger's terrible eyes seemed to possess the fabled fascination of the basilisk ; for Lomax, withering as he found their glare, was utterly unable to withdraw his own, or even to move a muscle of his body ; and thus he remained, for two or three minutes, rigid with horror, until, by a convulsive effort, he dashed down the

blind, uttering at the same time a shuddering groan ; immediately after which, overcome by contending emotions, he fell backwards in a fit.

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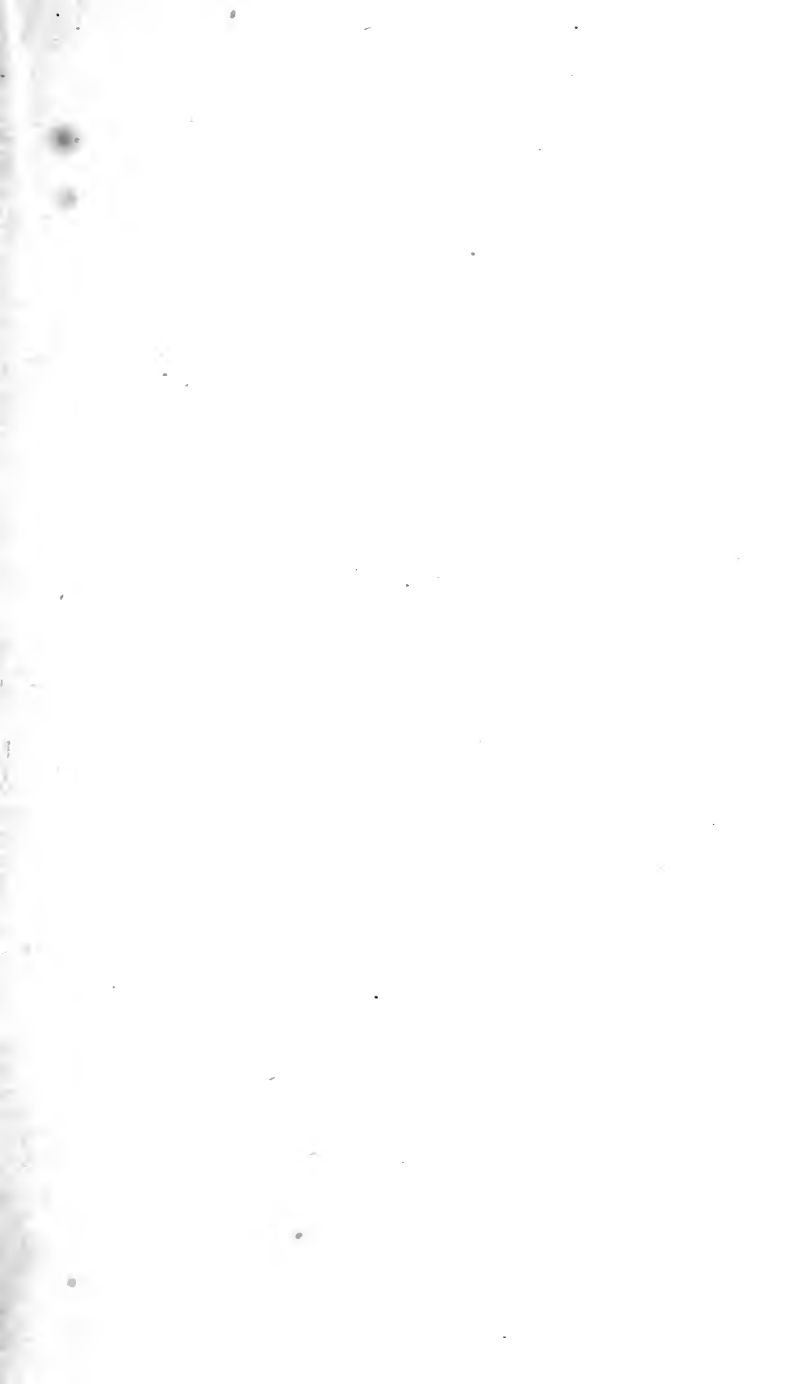
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